BERTRAND SINCLAIR, ALFRED HENRY LEWIS, LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE, EDGAR BEECHER BRONSON, ROMAN DOUBLEDAY AND OTHERS THIS ISSUE

No. 1
Vol. 13

TWICE-A-MONTH

15 CENTS

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

The Popular Magazine

JANUARY
MONTH-END EDITION
OUT-DEC. 24TH, 1909

The Chorus Swells From China to Peru

FROM THE PHILIPPINES.

Gentlemen:—Have just finished the October number of THE POPULAR and find it a corker. I heartily approve of the twice-a-month issue, and only hope you will decide to make it permanent. POPULAR can't come too often for me. I was talking to another of your Cavite readers this P. M., and we both agreed that if we had to scratch all magazines on our lists but one, THE POPULAR would be the one to stay. GEO. E. GARDNER.

United States Naval Station,
Cavite, Philippine Islands.

FROM CANADA.

Gentlemen:—I want to assure you that we on this side of the line appreciate your magazine as much as do our Southern neighbors, and we Western Canadians look forward to your excellent Western stories. I am glad to notice that your advertised price is now three dollars per year, an indication of your intention to continue publication semi-monthly. After a hard day at legal problems I find THE POPULAR the best "rest cure" I can get.

Winnipeg, Can. W. D. CARD.

FROM CALIFORNIA.

Gentlemen:—Just a word from this particular section of the navy. That twice-a-month stunt is the best ever. Keep it up. The old once-a-month POPULAR was mighty good, but the new one is a great deal better. We all read THE POPULAR here, and it is needless to say that we await with much impatience its coming. The covers are swell. C. D. VINNA.

U. S. Wireless Telegraph Station,
Mare Island, California.

FROM INDIANA.

Gentlemen:—There's a race on here that's a hummer. It's the regular twice-a-month dash for the news stands for THE POPULAR. I was two days late one issue, and the dealer had to order for me—that's the way they go here. Keep up the twice-a-month. We are all with you. I'd ask for it every day if I didn't know the obstacles in the way. But we'll buy it just as often as you put it on the stands.

Columbus, Ind. R. V. ROSS.

FROM OLD VIRGINIA.

Gentlemen: —I hardly think the English language contains words good enough to describe what I think of THE POPULAR. I'm awfully concerned about what we will do when you quit publishing twice a month. Take it from me that even twice a month is not enough. Why not weekly?

Norfolk, Va. WILLIAM H. ROSSOU.

FROM AN ENGLISHMAN.

Gentlemen:—I am an Englishman—only been over here about four years. We have a lot of magazines on the other side of the herring pond, but I must say none of them can come up to THE POPULAR. The college stories are simply great. Keep up the twice-a-month idea. We can't do without them. Twice a week would do all right.

STANLEY GRAVES.

College Point, N. Y.

FROM CHINA.

Gentlemen:—I look forward to each number of THE POPULAR with an unaccountable longing. You will understand this, as I have not missed a number since 1905, I believe. They have been forwarded to me by Messrs. Denniston & Sullivan of Shanghai to the following places: For four months in 1907-'08, to Java; in 1907 to Dutch Borneo, Celebes, Aroe Islands, New Guinea, Sumatra, and Straits Settlement; in 1908 to numerous points in Burma and India; in 1909 to the Philippines and about thirty different places in China and Formosa. Each number to me is as a breath from the homeland, being an exile for twelve years. Your stories are all good.

Amoy, China. J. E. HAUSMANN.

ANOTHER FROM CANADA.

Gentlemen:—Have been reading THE POPULAR ever since I can remember, and have always maintained that it was better than the "best." And since you have been getting it out twice a month the magazine is better than ever. I haunt the news stands around both publishing days, and am sorry that you can't keep up the pace forever.

Winnipeg, Can. LEIGHTON PETERS.

FROM MISSISSIPPI.

Gentlemen:—We your readers will surely raise a kick if you return to the once-a-month policy. In fact, we will not stand for it. You have given us just enough to whet our appetite, and now we are spoiled. If possible, give it to us weekly. The more the better.

Biloxi, Miss. ALFRED T. GOODMAN.

FROM MEXICO.

Gentlemen:—Just a line from a very busy man, but a pleased subscriber to THE POPULAR, who wants to see the bi-monthly edition continue after December, providing the standard of the stories does not deteriorate.

Mexico, D. F. C. M. BUTLIN.

YOU will be absorbed in the great mining serial, beginning in the next issue—out January 10th.

MONTH-END EDITION

VOLUME XV NUMBER 1

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

JANUARY 15, 1910

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THE FIRST FEBRUARY POPULAR ON SALE JANUARY 10th.

A Chat With You

WE have here a letter containing a suggestion. It is written on the paper of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, and is dated from Malaga, N. J. First we want to thank, as forcibly as we know how, the five readers of THE POPULAR who have been good enough to actively sympathize with our efforts to make the magazine better each month, and who have taken the trouble to write to us. We can't print all the letters of this kind that we receive, but we are grateful for every one of them. And now we are going to give you this particular letter itself.

Having read THE POPULAR for a period of five years, we, the undersigned, wishing to show our appreciation for your efforts to publish it semi-monthly, will each endeavor to secure a new reader during the coming two months.

THE POPULAR, having now over a million readers, could very easily have its circulation doubled by individual effort. We mean by that, let every reader secure a new one, which will double the circulation, thus practically assuring us a permanent semi-monthly magazine. Let us hear from other readers.

Sincerely yours,
C. T. EBENSPERGER,
HOWARD ADAMS,
EDWARD MAIER,
WILLIAM ADAMS,
MABEL L. MORRIS.

WE feel grateful to all five for writing the letter. Still more grateful for the kindly impulse which led them to write it, and which may introduce the magazine to people who don't know it and who ought to. As for the suggestion, we have nothing to say to it. It is for you, not for us, and you can decide for yourself. We want, naturally, all the circulation we can get, but inasmuch as at the present writing we are *outselling, twice a month, on the news stands every fifteen-cent magazine in America,* we feel that we can keep up the twice-a-month publication as long as we succeed in getting enough of the right kind of stories. Of course, the faster the magazine grows in circulation the easier it will be for us to get the right sort of fiction for it. And beside that, we hate to think that there are people who would enjoy THE POPULAR more than any other magazine if they only knew about it. We have a natural sympathy with every one who likes good, stirring fiction. Just think how you feel yourself when you have heard some especially good story. Your first impulse is to tell it to every one you have the least interest in, or who would be likely to enjoy it. It is a good impulse, too, not founded on vanity but on a generous human trait that prompts us to share the things we like the best with those we like. We have a great many good stories to give you every two weeks, and we don't want any one who would enjoy them to miss any of them.

THE race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong. Some time one may start out in life hopelessly handicapped apparently from the start, only in the end to win credit, renown, and all that the average man most desires. We wonder if all who read this have read Omar? He was a tentmaker by trade, and in the intervals of his tentmaking wrote verses that some of us remember still. In one of these he compared human beings to pots made of clay, moulded on a potter's wheel, some of them perhaps a little injured in

the moulding. B. M. Bower, who has written the complete novel for the number of THE POPULAR out two weeks from now, on January 10, is evidently familiar with this particular verse of Omar's. The novel in the next issue of the magazine is called "The Luckless Pot." It is a story of the West, of ranch life, of red-blooded men, and strong, elemental emotions. More than this, it is a story which will stir your sympathies. We are not going to spoil a splendid novel by even hinting at what happened to a lovable, courageous character, apparently terribly handicapped for the game of life. But we want your opinion of the story when you read it.

WE are always anxious to unearth new writers of promise, and we think that we have found one in George C. Shedd. He has never written anything for THE POPULAR in the past, but in the future we hope and believe that you will come to know his work very well and like it very much. A new serial by Shedd, "The Princess of Forge," starts in the first February edition of the magazine, out on the stands a fortnight from to-day—please remember the date—January 10. Don't fail to look for it in the magazine. You will find a good, generous installment, over thirty thousand words of one of the most exciting and holding tales of adventure and hard-hitting and strenuous living that you have ever read.

FORGE is the name of a mine in the Northwest, in one of the last and most fascinating of the wildernesses which have suddenly swarmed with men crazy for the lust of gold. There is just as much romance there now as there ever was in the golden California of the days of '49. And Shedd seems to have felt the stirring breath of it in his nostrils, and to have found the way to set it down on paper, so that we who read it can also live a little in its life and glow. Forge was a big mine, owned by [illegible] something to say about its management. But what's the use of talking about it now? You have two weeks to wait for it yet.

DID we tell you that we had added the name of Emerson Hough to the role of POPULAR writers? Hough wrote "The Mississippi Bubble," which you will probably remember as one of the best and best-selling novels of the last ten years. He is going to write a number of stories for THE POPULAR, and the first one of them, already on hand, will appear very soon. It has an odd title, "The Onion," and it's an odd sort of story, but there isn't any question about its being a good one. It is the kind of story that absorbs you absolutely while you read it, and leaves you thinking about it for a long time afterward.

AS we have said before, we want every reader of THE POPULAR to read everything in the magazine. We know that thousands of you think that the complete novel we publish each month is alone worth a great deal more than the price of the magazine, and if you notice the advertisement on the outside back cover of this number you will see that several publishers of $1.50 books and a great many readers of the same books think so, too. We'll admit willingly that it is a fact, but that doesn't satisfy us. There isn't anything in THE POPULAR, if we know it, that you can afford to skip, and this applies especially to the serials. So if you have missed a number through any inadvertence, please remember that you can get back numbers of the magazine from your newsdealer, and please remember once more that there are two dates in the month on which a new POPULAR appears —the tenth and the twenty-fifth.

The February Popular

FIRST-OF-THE-MONTH EDITION

For a quick glance at the first February POPULAR read this: A complete novel, "The Luckless Pot," by B. M. Bower; "The Game Warden," a realistic yarn of the Canadian woods, by A. M. Chisholm; Ralph D. Paine's college serial, "The Fugitive Freshman;" "Jones," a serio-comic storiette by W. B. M. Ferguson; **the first installment—thirty thousand words—of a serial by George C. Shedd, called "The Princess of Forge;"** a sea story, "The Mate of His Soul," by Morgan Robertson; Roman Doubleday's mystery serial, "The Red House on Rowan Street;" "Bulldog Brown," a rowing story, by Walter Camp; a motoring episode, "From the Ranks," by Charles R. Barnes; the second part of "The Furnace," by Louis Joseph Vance; and two inimitable little stories dealing with the lighter side of life by Max Marcin and Charles Neville.

ON THE STANDS JANUARY 10th

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XV. JANUARY 15, 1910. No. 1.

Piano Jim

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "The Land of Frozen Suns," "The Lair of the Sun-Dogs," Etc.

The Canadian Northwest is about as attractive a place of residence as the North Pole. You'd hardly expect to find such a thing as a piano in that outer edge of the earth. Yet in Mr. Sinclair's novel there is not only a piano, but the man who plays it is a born musician. There is some mystery about this genius, too, for he is known under a palpable alias, and his first meeting with the Northwest Mounted Police suggests possibilities of excitement that are amply fulfilled later on in the story.

(*A Complete Novel*)

FIVE scarlet-coated troopers of the Northwest Mounted Police drew rein on a point of the Cypress Hills that overlooked Fort Walsh, and paused to let their horses recover breath after a hard climb.

"Dammit," a trooper complained, "I'll be a drivelin' idiot if his nobs don't give me a show to get out and prowl around in these hills a little oftener. It's all stuff, this keepin' men cooped up the way he's doin'. If the Stonies or the Piegans do get gay and try to take us in, what about it? Ain't we in this country to have it out with 'em if they go to raidin'?"

"So far has you becomin' a drivelin' idiot, Hi must say Hi carn't see 'ow you lay it hon the k. o.," the sergeant retorted pointedly. "Han' expressin' yourself has goin' to be—that's bloomin' good. My word, you chaps as join from over the line is 'ard to please. Carn't you see, you 'igh-strung beggar, that 'e ain't to be blamed for keepin' 'is forces in 'and? Suppose 'e 'ad us, the bloomin' lot of us, as 'e used to, scoutin' han' ridin' the 'ills from sun-up to dawk, han' the blawsted Hinjuns 'it the post in a bunch? Wot 'u'd 'appen to them wimmin han' kiddies as 'e's got under 'is wing? Eh? 'E don't keep us pluggin' about the barricks for nothink. 'E just ain't takin' chances, if you awsk me."

"I guess yuh got the right idea, maybe," the trooper good-naturedly rejoined. "But yours truly would like these little jaunts to come oftener, that's all. I hate to be penned up."

"Righto, hold chap, Hi agree wi' you there," the sergeant made reply. "'Owever, we'd better be a-movin'."

"Yonder's a rider, comin' after us like the devil beatin' tan bark," another policeman announced, as the sergeant turned his horse toward the divide. The sergeant halted, and unlimbered a telescope.

"Cap'n Stone," he laconically informed the others, after a deliberate survey.

They waited, and in a few minutes Captain Jack Stone joined them, his round, boyish face wrinkled in an expansive grin. Official dignity often suffered fearfully at the hands of Captain Jack.

"Thought I'd like a little ramble myself, y'know, sergeant," he volunteered. "Sorry to depose you, Hodge, but the k. o. changed his mind about the objective point of this expedition. So, forward by twos."

Pointing north, they gained the extreme elevation of the Hills in half an hour's riding, and struck across the mile-wide table-land at a sharp trot. Captain Jack hummed a little tune to himself as he rode; it was the first time in weeks that he had been permitted beyond sight of the huddle of log buildings that constituted Fort Walsh. For the Northwest wriggled in the grip of war, and no man traversed its wide, uninhabited wastes without powerful incentive. The *metis*—descendants of white men and Indian women—had conceived grievances against the government in the territory of Saskatchewan, and were fighting tooth and toe nail, with cold steel and hot lead, for what they deemed their rights. Not so far north of the Cypress Hills—a matter of two hundred and fifty miles—history was being made.

With the first uprising of the *metis* came disturbing rumors of Indian trouble. The Blackfoot, the Bloods, and the Stonies decked their war horses and danced and held big councils; and when the young bucks stole off the reservation and pilfered here and there, the stockmen, scattered along the Hills from Medicine Lodge to East End, brought their families to Fort Walsh and left the cattle and horses to shift for themselves. The cattlemen knew that should the tribal warriors rise and strike a blow for the cause of their mongrel kinsmen, even Fort Walsh was none too secure.

As summer advanced, the restlessness of the Indians increased; the *metis* were holding their own in a succession of sharp engagements, and the red brother's scalp-lifting instincts struggled to assert themselves. White men crossed the vast distances between the Mounted Police posts with increasing apprehension. Communication dwindled to vital messages. Except for occasional dispatch bearers, and heavily guarded freight teams from across the line, Fort Walsh was cut off from the rest of the Territories, and no man knew or could guess what might come next.

Besides the marauding parties of young braves absent without leave from their reservations, stray bands of Crees who had never accepted treaty prowled through the Hills, killing cattle as they needed meat, and boldly appropriating to their own use the unprotected horses on the range.

Observing these straws and unable to know with certainty whether the government troops or the *metis* under Riel were carrying the day, depending on his own scouts to forewarn of any threatening Indian force, one can hardly wonder that the commanding officer of Fort Walsh kept the main body of his troopers closely within the bounds of the post. To men who at best were restless under the strict military discipline of the force, this was a greater hardship than actual siege. But the k. o. remembered the women and children, and, knowing the dubious methods of Indian warfare, took no chance of being surprised with half his force on patrol.

Hence the reckless exhilaration of Sergeant Hodge and his detail of four policemen—to say nothing of Captain Jack—at the prospect of a full day's freedom from the irksome restraint and monotony of barracks and barrack rule.

The Cypress range lies east and west, for all the world like the upheaving of a gigantic mole. Its seventy-odd miles of length rises abruptly out of a rolling plain. In the cañons and on its sloping sides the pine and cottonwoods stand in close-packed ranks; but on the very crest, instead of jagged peaks, the Hills are flat, level as if trimmed with

a mattock, a smooth table-land of varying width that runs the full length of the range. The "bench," as it is known, is void of tree or rock, but lies eternally under a thick carpet of bunch grass, a vast waving sward that changes with the seasons from pale green in the springtime to shimmering gold in the fall, and then lies under a two-foot fold of snow when winter comes down upon the land.

Across this bench, then, Captain Jack led his men. He angled slightly to the east, descended the north slope, and dropped swiftly into the cañon where Fish Creek takes its rise. Following the course of this stream, they debouched into open country by ten o'clock, and on the first knoll Captain Jack pulled up his horse. The cabins and corrals of a ranch showed on the creek bank in the distance.

"I see you have your glass, sergeant," he said. "I neglected to bring mine. Just take a squint at yonder place. See any one stirring? Any sign of life?" he asked, when Hodge kept his glass trained on the ranch for several minutes without audible comment.

"No, sir," Hodge replied, "Hi don't see nothink movin', sir."

"Very well, then," said the captain, "we shall go down and take a peep at short range. That, I presume you know, is the Powell horse ranch?"

"Yes, sir."

"And two men stayed behind to look after the stock when Powell brought his family to the post. Hardy beggars, eh, sergeant, to stick it out in these uncertain times?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, just after you left the post this morning, sergeant, one of these men rode in. He was ready to drop—been drilled, y'know. We're going down to see what about the other fellow. So, in case of ambush, you fellows stay in the open and cover me while I have a look around those buildings. You understand, sergeant?"

"Yes, sir—but, sir," Hodge was moved to protest, "they might pot you, sir, goin' hin alone. If hall of us go —safety in numbers, sir."

"They might pot us all, you see, in that case," Captain Jack patiently explained. "Whereas, if there's any hostiles there, and they cut loose on me—why, you fellows can clean them up, or get away if they're too many for you. That's the idea, sergeant. But I'm sure there's none of the beggars here at all —more's the pity."

The sergeant's automatic "Yes, sir," worked again, and then there was silence as they jogged nearer the ranch.

Coming to the gate of a little pasture that surrounded the place, the captain leaned from his saddle, threw down the bars, and commanding Hodge to halt there with his men, rode on into the ranch yard.

As he approached the house, a sound, or rather a succession of sounds so blended together as to seem one, caused Captain Jack to jerk his horse up very suddenly and listen. Straightway a look of mingled satisfaction and amazement spread over his face. To say that Captain Jack was pleasantly astonished, does not begin to express the state of his feelings.

"By Jove! Who'd dream of such a thing in this barbarous corner of the earth—and at such a time especially! I didn't even know Powell had a piano," he muttered.

Urging his horse up to the nearest door of the many-winged log building, he dismounted and stepped cautiously inside—cautiously, and yet betraying an amount of eagerness surprising in the extreme when one considers the repression habitual to a British military officer. Passing through the first room he entered, the captain came to a standstill on the threshold of the second doorway.

Absolute bareness characterized the walls and floor. Not a picture, not so much as a family portrait graced the whitewashed logs. A homemade table and two chairs stood at one side, close by an open fireplace that accentuated the general cheerlessness with its little heap of dead ashes. But in one corner of the big room stood a grand piano, and before it was seated a man whose fingers now raced up and down the

keyboard with marvelous velocity, and again lingered on the ivory row with a dainty, caressing touch.

Captain Jack noted his rough cowpuncher's garb, the pearl-handled Colt that protruded from its scabbard on his hip, the high-heeled boots, set off with silver-inlaid spurs. His perplexity increased. The incongruity was obvious, but there was no mistaking the quality of the music that filled the room, now arising in plaintive minor, now pouring forth in crashing, thunderous chords.

"My word, this is a rum go!" Captain Jack thought to himself. He made no sound, merely kept his position in the doorway, and the man at the piano was wholly absorbed in his music; not once did he take his eyes from the score. Presently the symphonic movement ceased. The pianist flipped a sheet to one side, and without hesitating a moment struck the keys again.

"My word!" Captain Jack whispered. "This *is* a dream."

The player had changed from the "Marche Funebre" to the first movement of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata." After the first few bars, Captain Jack lost all desire to interrupt the flow of melody by making his presence known. He leaned against the door casing and abandoned himself to the witchery of the music. It recalled to him people and things from which he had deliberately cut himself off.

The last time he had heard the "Moonlight Sonata" played by a master hand was at a musicale on the border of Kensington Gardens; and now it brought back to him the sound and feel of hansom cabs slogging through London mud. The old life that Captain Jack had turned his back upon came crowding vividly into his recollection, conjured up in spite of him by the melody that filled the low-ceiled room.

To music, the tonal effect of the pianoforte, the plaint of a violin, Captain Jack had always been responsive; it had power to move him as few things did. Seldom, indeed, did he fall under the spell of homesickness—but interpreters of Beethoven are seldom found on the frontier; and the "Sonata" was a link between him and something that for his peace of mind he had struggled to bury in the dead and dusty past. All that his home life means to an expatriated Englishman, and an extra pang for good measure, persisted in confronting him as he stood there listening to that wail of love and pain. And while the resentful mood laid fast hold of him, this master musician struck the last notes of the movement, whirled about on the stool, and stared at Captain Jack.

II.

For a brief time they eyed each other in silence. Captain Jack observed that the face of the stranger was a study in brown, a not unpleasing effect. The sun and wind of the ranges had tanned his cheeks and throat till their color shaded almost imperceptibly into the brown of his hair and mustache, and the week's growth of beard that bristled on his chin. His eyes, cool and impersonal in their steady gaze, were of the same dark color. His age might have been twenty-eight or thirty-eight; an elusive young-old quality about him made calendar estimation of his years a matter of pure guesswork.

"'Pon my soul," Captain Jack said, speaking the thing that was uppermost in his mind at the time, "you surprised me. That was real music, y'know."

"Isn't it a superb instrument, though?" the man cried enthusiastically, laying one hand lovingly on the piano. "Great heavens, who'd think of finding a grand with that tone in this God-forsaken territory—a thousand miles from nowhere!"

"Then you don't belong on the ranch?" the captain asked, jumping to this conclusion from the man's tone as much as his words, and remembering the object of his ride across the Cypress divide.

"Lord, no!" he replied. "I'm a wayfarer pure and simple. Blew in here about three hours ago. Nobody seemed to be around. My hoss was tired and I was hungry, so I made myself at

home. I guess the stock hands'll show up by and by. You don't belong here, either, I should judge."

"Stationed at Fort Walsh—on the south side of the Hills, y'know," Captain Jack enlightened, wondering whence this musical stranger in cowman's apparel had drifted, that he seemed to know so little of the Mounted Police and m. p. posts. "And, by Jove! you're a nervy beggar to be knocking about this country alone these days. You surely haven't much respect for Louie Riel and his half-breeds, or these blooming redskins that are sneaking up and down this part of the world looking for a chance to pot a white man and steal his stock."

"Haven't met any of 'em yet," the man responded carelessly. "They don't worry me much. Say, have you got any cigarette material on you, pardner?"

"I wish the rest of us could take the same philosophic view of the situation," Captain Jack dryly returned, handing over his tobacco pouch and a packet of papers. "You say no one has been about since you dropped in three hours ago?"

"Not a soul," the stranger declared. "We've been having a jolly lot of trouble all over the Northwest lately, and most of the ranchers abandoned their camps and came into the post when it got really threatening, y'know," Captain Jack explained. "Two men stayed here to look after things when the owner left. This morning one of them rode into the post with his carcass thoroughly punctured—unable to talk coherently, in fact. And, of course, we couldn't help having a try to locate the other chap. Don't look promising, by Jove! Can't even guess where or how it happened."

"Probably rode out together," the cowpuncher hazarded, "and the reds bushwhacked 'em. Hard to tell where or when you'll find the poor devil, if things are as bad as you say. Whose layout is this, anyway?"

"Chap named Powell. He moved his family to the post early in the spring, and, my word, but he sticks close."

"And left *this* behind for the red brother to hack up and use on a campfire if he came along." He ran his fingers lightly up and down the keys. "Oh, the son-of-a-gun!"

Captain Jack smiled at his earnestness. "I imagine it's dumb most of the time, even when the family's at home," he said. "However, that's neither here nor there. I don't see that I can do anything if that chap isn't around here. One can hardly undertake to find a lone man on these enormous prairies, when there's no clue whatever to his whereabouts. By the way, aren't you lately from over the line?"

The man laughed, a laugh of pure amusement. "I reckon only a bone-headed American pilgrim would be likely to prowl through these hills alone in a time like this, you think?" he asked.

"Not at all," Captain Jack assured him mildly. "But coming from the States one is supposed to report, y'know. Customs, and all that sort of official thing to go through. Merely a formality, of course, but the government insists on it. And, by Jove! it really isn't safe to travel alone, I assure you. I have a squad with me; you'd better jog back to the post with us."

The stranger considered a moment. "I'll go you, old hand," he declared, "though I hate like hell to desert this old grand. For a fact, when I headed for this part of the country I understood that everything was lovely in the Cypress Hills; that the trouble was away to the north of here. But, by the nine eternal gods of war, I've hit three or four ranches this last week looking for a chance to earn my bread by exercising my superior qualities as a cowman and a tamer of wild hosses —and, hang me, if everybody hasn't gone plumb to the wild bunch, left their camps to the rattlesnake and the badger. So I reckon I'll head into the post; maybe things'll come my way there. But, say, *amigo*, it's near noon; hadn't you better call in your roughnecks and have a bite to eat before you

start back? There's plenty of grub in the camp—I discovered that much."

"Good idea, by Jove!" Captain Jack agreed. "I believe I shall take your advice."

"Go to it," the cowpuncher counseled. "I'll build a fire to help the good work along." And he walked into the kitchen as Captain Jack stepped outside and signaled his men to come in.

After that, the captain led his horse to the near-by stable, slackened the cinch of his saddle, and fed him an armful of hay. When his troopers rode up he directed them to care for their mounts, and then forage for food in the Powell ranch house.

The troopers finished their task and departed for the house. Not yet wholly free from the effect of the "Sonata," Captain Jack elected to remain outside. He rolled a cigarette, lighted it, and walked up and down smoking, incidentally giving his mental processes full rein. Before long he found himself devoting the greater portion of his thoughts to the queer character he had found absorbed in the piano. By all the signs and tokens, according to Captain Jack's estimate of his musical ability, the man should have been a shining light, an accredited master of his instrument, in those ultra-civilized portions of the globe where talent passes at its face value. Yet he had the man's word that he was seeking work on a stock ranch. And by his colloquialisms, the self-reliant manliness of him, Captain Jack knew that he was no stranger to the West.

In the midst of these speculations the tinkle of the piano halted the captain. It was merely a few notes struck at random, however, and Captain Jack resumed his pacing. Almost directly two shots, then a third after the briefest of intervals, sounded within the house. He sprang to the door and rushed in, not pausing to wonder what new complication had developed, but with a distinct premonition that the shooting was not accidental.

His impression was verified, for the player of the "Moonlight Sonata" stood by the kitchen stove, six-shooter in hand; the sergeant and three troopers were grouped on the opposite side of the room, and stretched on the floor between lay the fourth mounted policeman, a blood-oozing hole under one eye attesting the precision of the cowpuncher's aim.

"My God, men!" Captain Jack demanded. "What's this about?"

" 'E was the hagressor, sir; 'e began it, sir," the sergeant declared emphatically, pointing to the dead trooper. "Hi must say it was a bloody queer thing. 'E must 'a' gone batty in 'is upper, sir, to up an' shoot at a stranger as wasn't sayin' a word nor doin' nothink hout o' the way. We all seed it, sir."

"You all saw it, did you?" snapped the captain. "Then, tell me exactly how it happened. By Jove! y'know, this is confoundedly serious—a devil of a mess."

"Well, sir," Sergeant Hodge went on, "it was like this, sir: We come in together, an' Brooks 'e stopped in the front room a-tinkerin' wi' the pianner, sir. The rest of us come into the kitchen, an' we was a-passin' the time o' day sociable-like wi' this chap as was 'ere, sir, w'en Brooks 'e jumps through the door wi' 'is revolver in 'is 'and, an' not a bloomin' word does 'e say but biff! bang! 'e blazes away twice—missin' both times, Hi think, sir, for Hi don't see no marks hon this chap—an' this chap 'e drors 'is pistol an' shoots, an' Brooks 'e drops. Then you steps in, sir, an' that's hall there his to it, sir."

"Most extraordinary, indeed," Captain Jack muttered. He stooped and laid his hand over the heart of the fallen man, but its beating was forever stilled.

"By Jove, old fellow," he said to the stranger, "this is really a deuce of a pickle. Upon my word, it is. I shall have to place you under arrest, of course. And I must warn you that anything you say may be used against you. What is your name?"

"We'll call it Jim Smith, and let it go at that," he answered calmly. "Is there a penalty attached to a man acting in self-defense in this free and en-

lightened community, that I must be arrested?"

"It will be merely a matter of form in this case, I should say," Captain Jack pacified. "Most extraordinary affair I ever heard. Brooks was an American also, I recollect. Rather an ugly-tempered beggar, too, wasn't he, sergeant?"

"'E was that, sir."

"He'll be sweet-tempered and peaceable enough henceforth," Smith—which name the captain put down as a palpable alias—broke in. "I know this *hombre* better than any of you. He only got what's been coming to him this long time. I'd have passed him up, if he'd been willing to have it that way. But he was looking for trouble, and he got it—an overdose of it, I reckon. So if it's necessary to arrest me, go to it. I killed him sure enough, but I'll be damned if I see what else there was to do under the circumstances."

Captain Jack made an impatient gesture. "You'll simply have to accompany us to the post," he explained; "and you were going to do that, anyway. I shan't disarm you, so long as you make no attempt to give us the slip. The sergeant's evidence alone would clear you, but these technicalities must be complied with, you understand."

"Sure," Smith nodded.

"Very well, then. Carry the body out in front and get a blanket or something to cover it," Captain Jack commanded. "Clean up this mess, and then, if you have any appetite left, get a bite to eat. We'll start back as soon as possible."

"Yes, sir," the sergeant automatically intonated, and with his three remaining men fell to the task.

Captain Jack went outside and seated himself on a log that projected from one corner of the house. In a few minutes Smith joined him. They sat there for some time without a word. Presently the captain's hand stole mechanically to his tobacco pouch. He took out sufficient material for a cigarette, then passed the pouch to Smith. They lighted up in silence. Then, after a long interval:

"Did you ever kill a man?" Smith began suddenly.

Captain Jack shook his head.

"Never rambled up and down this ball of mud we call the earth knowing that some time and somewhere you'd get into a position where you'd have to kill or be killed?"

"Well, you know, in the Force we have that contingency to face at times," the captain admitted.

"That's different. You have the law at your back; you're simply meeting with an obstacle in the way of duty. The personal equation hasn't much force there. But I mean man to man; the primitive struggle for mastery?"

"Never, I must confess, when you put it that way," Stone declared.

"It's a queer thing," Smith went on reflectively. "I've been there. I've dodged it time and again. Always had a horror of putting some other fellow's light out. Thought that killing meant that old remorse would hook his fangs into me and never let go. Now I've done it—had to do it—and the queer part of it is that it's a sort of relief. I feel like I'd shaken off some infernal incubus. Brooks is dead, and I'm still on deck as sound as a dollar—and it seems perfectly proper and natural. By the nine eternal gods of war, it *is* queer!"

"It's remarkable how we can adjust ourselves," Captain Jack observed. "I really can't say whether I would feel any compunction in such a case or not. One adapts oneself to certain phases of life with astonshing readiness," he concluded; and Captain Jack was not referring altogether to the case of the man by his side when he said that.

"Adapt ourselves? God, I should say we do," Smith affirmed, and there was a trace of the same bitterness that had cropped out in Captain Jack's intonation. After that, neither man spoke until a trooper poked his head out and announced that dinner was ready.

The meal was spread on the kitchen table when they went in. The body was gone, the blood stains had been carefully wiped from the floor, and no glaring trace of the tragedy remained.

But the atmosphere of it lurked over them. They ate hastily, speaking in subdued tones. And when the meal was over they stacked up the dishes and left the house—not precipitately, but as if the open, with its glowing sun and unflecked sky, was more to their liking than the quiet rooms where a man's life had come to an abrupt end not so many minutes before.

"Saddle up, and pack Brooks' body on his horse," Stone ordered, and in due time it was done.

They mounted and rode away from the ranch, Smith riding silently beside the captain, the others following two and two abreast. What of the killing and the mental depression that invariably follows hard on the heels of sudden, unexpected death, they bore away to the south with eyes not so alert to that which might chance within their range of vision. All but Smith. His glance roved from left to right, sweeping the miles of open country on either hand and the towering range of Hills before, with a half-conscious survey that overlooked no movement in the distance. So that it was he who pulled up, and halted the captain with a quick gesture.

"Look," he said quietly, his index finger pointing into the west, "there's something that'll interest you."

"A lone 'orse, ain't it, sir?" one trooper suggested. And—"Joggin' right along, too," said another. But it remained for Captain Jack to discover what Smith meant.

He took the sergeant's telescope, brought it to bear for a moment, then lowered it again.

"By Jove! that's apt to mean something," he said to Smith. "It's a horse with a stockman's saddle on—and no sign of his rider."

III.

Ordinarily, in a cattle country, the sight of a riderless saddle horse making his way toward home would not necessarily imply serious mishap to the man who had ridden him forth. To those familiar with the hazards of the range such a spectacle could be accounted for in a variety of ways, none of them likely to bring more than temporary discomfort to the man unhorsed. He might have dismounted to get a drink, lost his grip on the reins, and subsequently have been unable to grasp them again; or in the event of his mount being fractious, he might have been thrown. These would be the simplest explanations, and, like others that could and would be advanced by a stockman, a tiresome walk to the nearest ranch would be the utmost penalty for the carelessness or misfortune of allowing one's horse to get away.

But the group standing on the west bank of Fish Creek put a different interpretation on the appearance of the sweating brute that bore down on them, saddle leather a-creak and flanks heaving. For in those days, when the red brother had not wholly recognized the futility of powder and ball to check the increasing flood of white men that rolled across his ancient hunting grounds, a range rider hung like grim death to his horse. Afoot, he was helpless; mounted, he could show his heels to the inferior ponies of scalp-seeking braves. And there were many such hovering about the Hills that summer of the Northwest rebellion.

Huddled on barren reservations, eating the white man's bread and meat, the resentment of a conquered people smouldered among the tribes. Only yesterday, as it were, all that vast land was theirs. To-day, they walked within bounds set by an alien race. They could not realize that the buffalo would nevermore drift down from the skyline in tens of thousands. The deep-worn trails lined the prairies as freshly as if the multitude of hoofs had beaten them overnight. The white man, they said in their councils, had driven the buffalo away—but they would come again, and with the herds to live upon they would drive the oppressor back to the rising sun, whence he came.

But the bison were gone. The bleaching skeletons of them littered the earth. The hide hunters had obliterated the herds. No more could the Indian draw

upon that great commissary that had supplied his every need as far back as the tribal legends ran. In his primitive simpleness he could not understand; he could only resent. And when that body of men in whose veins mingled the red blood and the white revolted against the powers that were, the Indian's resentment took concrete forms, and the young men stole forth in their war paint to take the white man's scalp.

So that to these policemen the riddle of the riderless horse was easy to read. They advanced to meet him, ranging apart, and when the tired brute, holding straight to his line of travel, came up to them they closed in. Smith's rope flashed through the air, and the noose settled over the head of the horse.

"No bullet marks on him that I can see," Captain Jack decided after a hasty glance. "But I really believe the second Powell man is accounted for. The P on the shoulder there is Powell's brand. Bad outlook for that chap, I should say."

The sergeant and the troopers remained silent. With a troop captain in charge, discipline forbade comment or suggestion unless directly asked for. But no such conditions governed Smith, and so he spoke his mind unhesitatingly.

"Maybe not so bad as it looks," he said. "First thing, this *caballo* hasn't been touched by a bullet, as you say. But if the man that rode him was hit there should be some trace. Still, there's no sign of blood on him—only where he's been unmercifully spurred. You can take it straight from me that when his rider quit the job Mr. Hoss took a bee line for home. I don't say this missing stock hand may not be done for, shot, scalped, and his heart stuck up on a pointed stick. But I reckon that if you head in the direction this pony appeared from, you'll be apt to find the remains. And you can't tell; maybe the poor devil is busy right now standing off a bunch of reds like a dead-game sport."

Smith ceased, and Captain Jack pulled thoughtfully at his mustache.

"Upon my word, Smith, you make out a good case," he finally declared. "I really believe it's worth trying."

That was all the captain said. Immediately they pressed forward at a trot, angling up toward the foot of the Hills, each man alert for sight or sound of hostiles.

"This direction will take us across the upper edge of the Graburn Basin, eh, sergeant?" the captain asked after an hour's steady jogging.

"Yes, sir; we'll strike the trail as leads down MacKay Creek, about ten miles north o' the post, at this rate, sir," Hodge replied.

"Jolly bad place for a scrap, if we should be tackled after we get in the timber," Stone remarked. "But I dare say we shall be able to give a good account of ourselves if it becomes necessary. I hope we chance on that missing beggar. I fancy it would be rather tough to be set afoot, and have a lot of blooming savages plugging away at one. I wonder just how—aha! By Jove! what's that now?"

The captain and Smith heard and acted simultaneously, pulling their horses from a brisk trot to a standstill so abruptly that the sergeant and a trooper bumped squarely into them. But they paid no attention. The captain stood in his stirrups, and Smith leaned forward, head tilted to one side, listening intently. In a few seconds that for which they were straining their ears sounded very distinctly.

"There you are," Smith exclaimed. "By the nine eternal gods of war, there's a bunch of them at it, by the noise!"

"My word, yes," said Captain Jack. "I judge it to be on the other slope of this ridge we're facing, too."

"Sounds that way to me," Smith agreed.

"Very well. Forward, men," Captain Jack ordered. "Steady now, till we have the beggars located."

It was not more than three hundred yards to the summit of the ridge that obstructed a clear view of the country lying to the west. On both slope and crest the bunch grass reached stirrup

high; stirred by a breeze it undulated in graceful ripples, like a great gray-green pool disturbed by a falling stone. Among this growth of tall, waving stems a man could drop on all fours and be lost to sight. When they neared the ridge top Captain Jack halted his detail, swung lightly down from his mount, and advanced alone to reconnoiter. The troopers gauged his progress by the agitation of the grass. Soon that could no longer be observed. The popping of guns continued beyond the divide.

In a brief period Captain Jack's head arose from the concealing vegetation. He retraced his steps hurriedly till he could speak without raising his voice, and called to them:

"Harrison, you hold the horses. The rest of you come on."

Harrison gathered into his hands the reins that each man flung down, and damned the captain right heartily for keeping him out of action. But his complaint was lost to the others. Carbines in hand, they joined Captain Jack, and under his direction wriggled to the summit of the ridge, where, perfectly hidden, they could look down into the Graburn Basin.

From this vantage point they took in the situation at a glance. Beginning a little to their left, an embryo creek, merely a shallow depression, ran down the slope and meandered across a small flat before it plunged again into rolling hills. Midway of this flat occasional smoke puffs issued from a buffalo wallow. To one side of the wallow stood a canvas-covered wagon. A horse was stretched on his side at the end of the tongue. Another stood with drooping head by the hind wheel. Two more, supposedly staked out to graze, regarded the fight with pricked ears. But the thing that made the forefinger of each policeman curl tentatively within the trigger guard was a score of brown objects creeping nearer that shallow pit, and firing as they crept. Back of a hillock the policeman could see the cluster of war ponies under guard.

"About four to our one, I should judge," Captain Jack calculated deliberately. "But I imagine we'll shock the beggars considerably, just the same. Now, men, sight for five hundred yards, and give 'em fits. Get an Indian every shot, if you can."

Smith smiled at the captain's nonchalance, and brought the sights of his Winchester to bear on a dark body that was clearly defined against the straw-colored grass. The five reports came almost together, and as the policemen slid fresh cartridges home and fired again the attacking party below forgot their hunger for a white man's scalp and broke for their ponies in undignified haste.

Under a steady fire from the five guns on the hilltop the braves mounted and ran. Not quite all of them, however. Captain Jack's men were good shots—almost the pick of the Force—and they wasted little lead. Until the fleeing aborigines were wholly out of range of the 45-70's the policemen lay on their stomachs in the tall grass, firing methodically. Then they flung themselves on their horses—which Harrison had led to the top of the hill—and dashed down the slope.

Mounted on a lighter, fleeter-footed horse than the policemen rode, Smith was first to reach the buffalo wallow and the wagon with its lazily flapping cover. And when Captain Jack and the sergeant alighted from the saddle, the cowpuncher was on his knees holding up the head of an unconscious woman. Smith glanced up at the captain. And the captain wondered at the look, for the man's face was a study in emotion, surprise, and pity, and something that was akin to anger struggled for mastery on his countenance. Besides the woman, only one man—and he wounded in the leg—had held the pit.

"Is she hurt?" Captain Jack asked quickly, the practical side of him asserting itself.

"Not what yuh could notice," the wounded man answered promptly. "She laid low and worked her Winchester like an old warrior as long as the damned cannibals were smokin' us up.

But when they quit, and she seen you fellers come chargin' down the hill, she laid 'em down all of a sudden. Talk about your nervy girls, she's got 'em all——"

"Is there any water in that wagon?" Smith cut in harshly.

"I don't know," the man replied. "If there is, it's warm as sop. But there's a good spring not more'n a hundred yards down this draw. I'd be there a-runnin' if I had two good legs."

Smith laid the girl down very gently. He sprang out of the shallow hole and reached the wagon before the slower-moving sergeant got halfway. A small tin pail lay by the place where a camp fire had been built, and taking this he swung onto his horse. In a minute or two he was back with the bucket full of cold spring water.

Captain Jack had propped the girl—for she seemed to be little more than twenty-two or three—up against the bank of the wallow. Smith sprinkled the water over her face, forced a little between her flaccid lips, and the color crept slowly into her cheeks again. As she opened her eyes dazedly, Smith upset the last of the water, by accident it seemed.

"I'll get some more," he said, and rushed for his horse.

He disappeared down the coulée. A minute passed, then five, and still there was no sign of Smith returning. The girl sat up, spoke to the captain, even laughed weakly. Then Captain Jack got out of the buffalo wallow, mounted his horse, and galloped to the spring. The tin pail stood in the grass beside the bubbling pool—but Smith himself was gone.

IV.

"The beggar has surely slipped away," Captain Jack muttered. He glanced around him for a moment, then got down and refilled the empty tin bucket.

With this in his hand he rode up on a near-by butte and scanned leisurely the surrounding country. But no sight of a rider rewarded his pains, and he returned to the wagon. Since there was no guarantee that the Indians would not circle back and renew hostilities once they observed that only five men had cut down several braves and half a dozen ponies, he dared not send part of his force on any extended hunt for Smith. So the captain made up his mind to take things as they came and let his quasi-prisoner go unmolested.

The girl was standing by the wagon when Captain Jack reached it. A little over medium height, with the natural color of youth once more in her face, she was almost a perfect type of blonde femininity; and Captain Jack was partial to fair-haired women with dark-blue eyes. He caught himself staring almost rudely at her, and the result of his prolonged gaze set him to wondering.

She was altogether different from most of the women Captain Jack had seen on the frontier, the hardy-souled wives and sisters of the pioneer element. Not only her physical appearance differed, but her dress—and when she talked, her language. Plainly she was not wholly of the range, though her looped-up riding skirt and felt hat, and her manner of wearing them, betokened familiarity with the life. But there was an air of assurance, a perfect poise, about her that Captain Jack had never found outside of that class to which he himself belonged by birth.

"Are there only the two of you?" Captain Jack inquired, bethinking himself that his scrutiny was rather impertinent.

She smiled, and, glancing toward the buffalo wallow, tucked a vagrant lock of hair behind one ear. Captain Jack caught the flash of a plain gold band incircling a finger.

"No," she answered slowly. "I was alone at first. My two brothers left camp early this morning to look for some horses that got away last night. About two or three hours ago this stranger"—she indicated the man who was now sitting on the rim of the buffalo wallow, having his wounded leg bandaged by the sergeant—"appeared over the brow of the hill, galloping like

a fugitive, and, almost directly, the Indians came in sight, shooting at him. Just as he reached the flat, his horse stumbled and fell. I picked up a rifle and dropped into that hole. The horse got up and dashed on over the ridge to the east. The man crawled across the flat and got into the wallow with me, and we managed to keep the Indians off till you came. I don't think we'd have lasted much longer, though," she concluded simply. "I had only six cartridges left, and he had not many more."

"My word, that was a close shave!" Captain Jack exclaimed. "This fellow must be the very man we started out to look for. A rider from the Powell ranch, you know."

"Yes; I remember he told me he was from the Powell ranch," she confirmed. "I see you have his horse. He also said that another rider was shot, but managed to get into the timber."

Captain Jack nodded. The other, he knew, was the man who had ridden into Fort Walsh that morning.

"I really don't know what to do about your brothers," he went on perplexedly. "We must get on to the post—there's just a chance that those unruly devils will take a notion to swing back and have another try at us. Of course, we settled some of them, but we're still in the minority. It's out of the question to leave you here, and I really can't institute a search for your brothers. We shall have to break up your camp, and take you along. And if nothing has happened to those fellows, they'll be jolly well puzzled when they get back here and find you gone, lock, stock, and barrel."

"Let them be puzzled, then," she returned shortly. "I don't want to be left alone again; it's too much of an ordeal, if this sort of thing is likely to be repeated. Let them solve the puzzle."

"Well," the captain decided, "I think the easiest way will be to leave a note stuck upon a stick. At least that's the best I can think of."

Captain Jack immediately prepared to get under way, for it was getting well into the afternoon. The troopers harnessed the remaining pair of horses—of the lead team, one lay dead by the wagon tongue, and the other was hopelessly crippled. But the one stout team was easily able to lug the wagon, even with the camp outfit aboard. When they were about to start, and the girl had taken her seat beside the trooper whom Captain Jack had detailed to drive, she leaned out and spoke to the captain again.

"I almost forgot," she said indifferently, "but part of our bunch of horses are—or were, not long ago—feeding somewhere down this draw. It might be well to pick them up, if the Indians haven't already done so."

"Certainly," Stone answered. "Sergeant, take one trooper and see if you can run across this stock. But don't get far from us—not more than a mile or two."

The sergeant went on his errand. Captain Jack, and the trooper who led the horse on which was packed the body of Brooks, led the way. The Powell man nursed his perforated leg in the body of the wagon; his pony followed at the end of a lead rope attached to the hind axle. The girl stared straight ahead from under her broad felt hat as the team forged ahead to the clucking of the Mounted Policeman who held the reins.

Before they had gone far the sergeant overhauled them, bringing as the result of a short detour about twenty head of saddle horses—wiry, good-looking brutes. The sergeant threw the bunch ahead of the wagon, and the captain ranged alongside him.

"Corking good lot of mounts there, sergeant," he observed, noting the clean limbs and elastic gait of each horse.

"Hindeed, yes, sir," Hodge replied.

"I shouldn't be surprised if these people have also come across the line without the ceremony of reporting—as our departed friend Smith did. My word, sergeant, what if that beggar should be in some way connected with this outfit? Hanged if we haven't stumbled on more than one pretty how-de-do to-day," the captain declared.

"We 'ave that, sir," Hodge agreed, but refused to commit himself farther.

"Well, at all events, we've accomplished the thing we set out to do—largely by chance, I must admit," Captain Jack continued. "I dare say it will always remain a mystery why Brooks made an unprovoked attack on a supposed stranger. Looks rather odd, too, that a girl should be left alone in a semi-hostile country. Queer lot, these Western Americans; jolly handy with their firearms, too, most of them. I can't imagine why Smith should decamp the way he did. However, I fancy it'll all come out in the wash."

"Yes, sir; Hi expect so, sir," the sergeant coincided. Thereafter they rode without speaking, and the only sounds in that huge expanse of waving, shimmering grass were the soft *put-put* of horses' hoofs, the clanking, rattling monotone of the wagon that toiled behind.

So they advanced to the foot of the Hills. The timbered slopes of the Cypress range lost their misty purple shade, and became living green; lone trees on bare ridges stood clear against the sky. An odor of pine came down to them on the wings of a south wind. A faint trail appeared, winding out of the Hills, a few dim wagon tracks in the heavy grass. Into this they turned. Ten miles beyond, on the far side of the "bench" now towering over them, Fort Walsh hugged close to the swift-flowing Battle Creek.

As they rounded the base of an abruptly rising pinnacle close to the mouth of the cañon through which the trail led upward, Captain Jack turned in his saddle and let his gaze sweep slowly over the vast solitude of grassland that spread to the north—its dark lines, that were creeks, the bald ridges, the monotonous flats. And as he looked, away in the distance a black spot that his eyes rested upon suddenly disappeared. A moment later it came into sight again, sprang from the depths of a coulée, and advanced swiftly. Captain Jack halted his party.

"Let me have the glass, sergeant, if you please," he requested.

Through the powerful lens, this moving blot on the landscape resolved itself into a bunch of horses, heading straight for the wagon. Close behind loped a rider. Captain Jack lowered the telescope and waited. In ten minutes horses and rider took tangible form before the naked eye. Soon they were breasting the slope on which the policemen were halted. Then Stone held the glass on them again.

"By Jove! if it isn't our friend Smith," he drawled in a tone of genuine astonishment. "Most extraordinary thing, indeed."

He handed back the glass and made himself a cigarette. After a further interval the leaders of the bunch came up, passed the wagon, and mingled with the few head that the sergeant had picked up on the flat. Smith jogged along slowly, far in the rear. A hundred yards away he pulled up, dismounted, and stood beside his horse, his back turned on the group of watching policemen. Captain Jack waited a short time, then rode back.

Smith was carefully looping up the latigo end when the captain reached him. He looked up and smiled.

"I'm on the spot once more, you see," he said whimsically. "Did you think I'd quit for good?"

"Well, I rather thought so," the captain frankly admitted. "You left so suddenly. I say, you've got hurt, haven't you?"

"That?" Smith held up a fist wrapped in a blood-soaked handkerchief. "Oh, that's a little token of esteem from an old acquaintance. It's not so bad as it looks; just a flesh wound. Say, I'm a pretty good horse rustler, don't you think?"

"My word, yes," Captain Jack responded. "I see the brand is the same as these others we have. I wonder where their owners are?"

Smith sobered a little. "The true owner," he said, "is that girl in the wagon yonder."

"Oh," said the captain, "then what of the two brothers?"

"They're out on the flat somewhere,"

Smith informed bluntly. "It would be a good thing if they'd stay there."

"I take it," Stone said pointedly, "that you know these people. Did you see those men out there?"

"Yes," Smith answered as shortly. "I know them. And I saw the brothers down there in the Basin."

"Then, why the mischief didn't you bring them along with their stock?" asked Captain Jack. "What's the mystery? I can't delay much longer, and still I really don't like to abandon men in a semi-hostile country like this. I wish you'd explain, my dear fellow, if you can."

"Don't delay on their account," Smith counseled. "They'll show up, all right. And there's no particular mystery; at least, if there is, I haven't got the key. But I'm satisfied that they'll be at Fort Walsh almost as soon as we are. There's just one thing that may look odd to you—I don't want that girl to see me, right now. If you'll start the outfit on, I'll poke along behind. I reckon you don't need any assurance that I won't disappear again. Maybe this looks queer to you, but I've a good reason, and some of these days you'll know what it is."

"Of course, if you wish to keep out of her sight it makes no difference to me," Captain Jack told him, and rode back to the wagon, wondering what new sort of complication had arisen.

Smith still stood by his horse, fidgeting with the saddle riggng. The girl looked out from under the canvas when Captain Jack came up, but made no comment on the absence of her brothers.

Gathering up the loose horses, the sergeant and a trooper plunged into the cañon; the wagon followed, creaking and jolting up the ascent, and when the party was once more under way the captain lagged behind and fell in with Smith again.

Thus they passed through the wooded gash in the Hills, up to the smooth bench, across its grassy breadth, and dipped down the southern slope, whence they could see the brown huddle that was the post. In this distance the captain and Smith did not exchange half a dozen sentences, and the more Captain Jack let his mind dwell on them the more peculiar did the incidents of that day seem. But Smith rode as if in no humor for explanations, and silently they turned into the barrack square just as the sunset gun signaled the end of another day.

V.

That night Smith slept in the guardhouse. At nine in the morning he was brought before the post commander, who, in his capacity of chief magistrate, viewed the body and heard the story of the sergeant and his three troopers. Smith himself refused to shed any light on the cause of Brooks' attack. He stood pat on the ground of self-defense. And when the policemen had borne witness to the truth of this, there was no room to doubt that Brooks meant to kill him. So, after a brief hearing, Smith was freed.

He walked out of the room and stood in front of the building, gazing about as if in search of something. Captain Jack, watching through the window, saw him at last step down off the porch and walk away. And the captain's curiosity was at once aroused, for Smith went straight toward the canvas-covered wagon that was drawn up on a grassy plot at one end of officers' row.

The two Bolands—which Captain Jack had learned from the girl, was their name—had ridden in at dusk. In contrast to Smith, they were talkative, and related with much detail how they had searched for their horses, but had been unable to pick them up. They had seen no Indians. Not finding their stock, they had at last returned to the camp, found there unmistakable traces of a fight, and followed the trail of the wagon in haste to Walsh. Whereupon Captain Jack decided that either they or Smith had lied. For Smith had distinctly told him that he had seen the brothers in the Basin that afternoon. And Captain Jack, for some reason that he could hardly define to his own satisfaction, was loath to doubt Smith's

word. There was something about the man that appealed to the captain, and while his British temperament was nowise prone to take a man on trust at such short notice, he felt that Smith was "all right," as they say on the frontier.

The captain stepped outside. Smith was going directly to the camp. Stone saw the two men rise from their seat on the wagon tongue. From where Captain Jack stood he could almost hear them speak, every motion was plain. They stood facing Smith, and presently one of them turned his head and said something; immediately the girl came out of the tent that was pitched close by, and she, too, stared fixedly at Smith.

As he drew nearer the group one of the men stooped and, picking up a pistol belt that lay near his feet, buckled it around him. Suggestive as the action was, Smith gave no heed, but the girl moved closer to her brother and laid a hand on his arm. He shook it off impatiently. By this time Smith had reached the wagon.

The captain's breath came a little faster than usual for a few seconds. There was an air of rampant hostility about the actions of the men he was watching, something that Captain Jack was keenly aware of even at that distance. The impression was largely a subconscious one, but none the less strong. A repetition of the Brooks affair would have been no great surprise to Captain Jack at that moment. He even found himself hoping the girl would have sense enough to stand aside if any gun-play transpired.

While Captain Jack observed them in this expectant frame of mind, Smith stood his ground, speaking to the two Bolands. Stone could see the taller of the brothers shrug his shoulders occasionally.

Finally Smith pointed to the north, to the south, then swept the whole Cypress range in one comprehensive gesture. Both men shook their heads. The girl put up one hand and pushed the hair back from her forehead, the gold band on her finger glinting in the sunlight. Her attitude seemed to be one of expectancy.

Smith pointed south again, and Stone heard one of the men laugh derisively. Then Smith turned abruptly and left them. The girl took a step after him, but one brother caught her by the arm. Shaking herself loose from his grip, she went quickly into the tent.

Captain Jack watched this little byplay, and stood gnawing thoughtfully one end of his mustache—Smith's bearing had been that of a man delivering a threat, or a demand; and the captain wondered. Indeed, Captain Jack Stone had done nothing much but wonder since he stepped into the Powell ranch house the afternoon before.

Smith came slowly up and seated himself on the edge of the porch. He sat there a second or two, poking tentatively the soft dirt with his boot heel. Then he turned to the captain, and his speech was of commonplace needs.

"I overheard one of the guards talking last night about the Force having a bunch of saddle stock to break in," he said. "Who attends to that sort of business around here?"

"The quartermaster," Captain Jack replied. "Are you thinking of having a try at it?"

"Well, I've got to do something to live," Smith answered reflectively. "There's no work on the range, it seems. I reckon I'll have to make the quartermaster give me that job."

Stone pointed out the quartermaster's office, and Smith left him. Yielding to a sudden impulse Captain Jack strolled over to the Boland camp, and inquired perfunctorily if they were ready to have their horses inspected—a mission which, in ordinary routine, he would have delegated to an orderly. But fair-haired women with expressive blue eyes were seldom seen on the frontier, and Captain Jack was tolerably young and very human.

"Any time you want to look them over," Boland answered. "Tom has just gone to turn 'em out to graze, but I'll go head him off."

Boland had a saddled horse tied to

the wagon, and as he made ready to start, the girl came out of the tent. She had discarded her riding habit. Dressed in a plain blue skirt and jacket, her yellow hair brushed and coiled, the sight of her quickened the captain's pulse just a trifle.

"Good morning, Miss Boland," he greeted. "How do you feel after the tumult of yesterday?"

"Not so badly, thank you," she returned.

Boland clattered away, and as he whipped out of sight behind a building the girl flung a question at Captain Jack that startled him considerably.

"Was that man Smith shot in the fight with the Indians yesterday, Captain Stone?" she asked hurriedly.

"Why, no, he wasn't," the captain answered slowly. "He got that while he was out on the flat—after those horses of yours. Why?"

"Nothing in particular," she evaded. "I just wondered. Do you know——"

Whatever she wished to know was left unasked, for at that instant Walt Boland returned to the wagon, and she fell silent. Boland dismounted and took up the conversation. Directly the girl vanished within the tent, and shortly thereafter Captain Jack took leave of the camp.

As he returned to the post commander's sanctum, Smith hailed him once more.

"Well, I landed the job of chief broncho-twister—providing I can tame the wild ones properly," he told the captain.

"Good for you," Stone congratulated, though it seemed to him that a man was more entitled to condolence when he undertook a task of the sort Smith had just accepted.

"You'll be a fixture here for a while, then," he went on. "By Jove! if you stay here I hope you'll let us hear you play sometimes. One of the inspectors has a fair sort of piano in his quarters—married man, y'know; rather decent chap. It would be a treat to hear some of your playing, I assure you."

"Maybe," Smith returned in a noncommittal way. "I'm much obliged, but I'm afraid I'll have to stick to business. Handling bronks will put my hands in bad shape to finger a keyboard. Well, *adios,* captain. I go to work at noon."

Smith disappeared in the direction of the corrals, and Captain Jack proceeded about his duties. A little later in the forenoon the Boland stock was duly inspected, appraised, and the duty paid—for, as Captain Jack had surmised, they, like Smith, hailed from over the line, and they announced their intention of locating in the Hills when the breed uprising was over. Meantime, they proposed to tarry within the shelter of the post. Fort Walsh had originally been their destination, Walt Boland explained, but not knowing the country, they had swung too far west and north, which accounted for their being in the Graburn Basin.

So, for the time being, quiet settled on the post. No more Indian depredations came to light. In truth there was nothing for the roving bands to assail but abandoned ranches and the grazing stock. Only one outfit in the Hills, and that an American cattle company, refused to quit their range; and their safety lay in numbers, for they knew that a dozen fighting cowpunchers were practically immune from attack.

Drills, guard mount, occasional patrol, went on monotonously at Fort Walsh. Powell's wounded range riders convalesced in the hospital. Smith toiled patiently in the post corrals, metamorphosing a lot of wild-eyed, snorting brutes itno steady-going troop horses. And somewhat to Captain Jack's disgust, his unattached fellow officers speedily discovered that the Bolands were "rawther decent chaps, y'know"; the outcome being that the official clique of femininity was forced to extend open arms to Dorothy Boland and her brothers. Which state of affairs prevented Captain Jack from seeing quite as much of this self-contained young woman as he would otherwise have done.

Thus a month passed.

VI.

At dusk one evening a saddle-weary policeman rode into Fort Walsh and sought the post commander in his private quarters. It happened that Captain Jack was sulking in a hammock on the major's wide veranda; farther down the line of officers' houses what the captain contemptuously termed a "tea fight" was in progress, and braid-trimmed uniforms clustered about Dorothy Boland like bees hovering over a flower.

Captain Jack had made a footless attempt to monopolize her for a few minutes, and then had withdrawn from the festivities—hence the sulks. So when the major called to him excitedly, Captain Jack arose and entered leisurely through the low window.

"What's the row?" he inquired mildly.

"Row nothin'!" the major snorted, waving a bunch of letters triumphantly. "We've whipped 'em—whipped 'em good and plenty, the beggars! Got 'em on the run, my boy. Had a three days' fight at Batoche, and according to a dispatch from the commissioner, the rebellion is practically over. He expects to capture Riel before I read this. Got word from the west, too. Indians quieting down. All these infernal war parties are sneaking back to the reservations. So now we'll have a chance to get out and clean up this country again. I'd like to take a crack at some of these marauding devils that have been stirring up merry hell in the Hills. Supplies and mail are on the way. And best of all, my boy, the road is getting on. They've laid steel to Swift Current, and expect to have the thing complete this fall. I tell you, Jack, we'll soon be civilized! Fancy having a transcontinental railway through this blasted wilderness. These confounded refugees can get back to their ranches now."

"Yes, I dare say they can," Captain Jack agreed. "It'll be rather a relief not to be cooped up—it's been much worse than out-and-out siege."

"You'll get action enough," the major assured him emphatically. "There'll be no end of police work once the C. P. R. gets through. Between whisky runners and horse thieves and cattle of that ilk—oh, we'll have tough characters enough to keep the Force busy. Here, you, Burrows. Hi!"

The major lifted up his voice, and the sound of it brought his trooper servant hurrying from the kitchen. Emphatically and profanely the major commanded him to bring a bottle of port from a certain case in the cellar, and when it arrived he and Captain Jack solemnly drank to the queen, to the speedy capture of Louis Riel, and to the general confusion of all Great Britain's enemies, ancient and modern, after the way of Englishmen in the far places of the earth. Then the major seated himself again in the depths of a huge armchair.

"Well, good night, my boy," he said presently. "I'm due to turn in. Get out and spread the glad tidings. I'll set you all to work, and we'll have a cleaning of the Hills when that mail and supply train gets here and confirms the news. Good night."

Captain Jack closed the door behind him and strolled thoughtfully away. To be strictly truthful, he was too much absorbed in a bit of retrospection to be quite as elated over the good news from the seat of war as a patriotic subject should have been. The captain, as many a man has done before him, was letting his mind dwell on the way of a woman, and compared with that the matter of smashing Louis Riel and his turbulent followers was of little interest to him—while he was in that mood, at least.

"Hang me," he muttered to himself, "I thought I'd got away from all that foolishness. And here I am, all ready to make an ass of myself again. Jack Stone, you *are* a bloomin' ass."

From which one might reasonably infer that Dorothy Boland was not the first woman to disturb Captain Jack's peace of mind.

Poking along slowly through the dark that the dim post lights could not dispel, he passed within a few yards of

the Boland camp. A fire crackled in the space between tent and wagon, and he could see Walt Boland sitting cross-legged in the reddish glow. He went on, and a little farther turned a corner and almost walked into Smith, who was leaning against the picket fence staring at the man by the fire.

"Hello, old chap!" the captain greeted—the four weeks had but strengthened his liking for the quiet, dark-featured man. "I say, y'know, one would think you were keeping watch on the enemy. Ha! ha!" It was a feeble attempt to be jocular, but the result was hardly what Captain Jack looked for.

"By God, I am!" Smith flung back. "And if it wasn't for spoiling things, I'd unlimber and get into action right now."

"Eh? What!" Captain Jack stopped short, and regarded Smith wonderingly. There was no mistaking the passion that rang in the man's tone. "You amaze me. My word! but you feel strongly on that subject."

"I'll amaze you a damned sight more, before long," Smith went on recklessly. "I'm getting weary of this. Captain, I want to tell you something. I'm pretty nearly up against a rock wall. Maybe you can get a different angle on the thing—it's getting too much for me."

"Come along to my quarters," Stone suggested. "We can sit down and have a smoke and talk there."

"All right," Smith acquiesced. They followed along the row, coming at last to Stone's log-cabin quarters. Until they had seated themselves and lighted a cigar each, Smith did not speak again. Then he peered at Captain Jack through the curling smoke wreaths with an odd puckering of his lips.

"I reckon you'll think I'm a mighty unstable individual," he began apologetically at last. "I do get tired of keeping a lot of disagreeable feelings bottled up inside me, though; and I was just about bubbling over when you ran into me a while back. Posing as a Sphinx never did strike me as being natural to the average human. But somehow I can't quite bring myself to unloading my troubles on you."

"Go ahead, if it'll be any relief, my dear chap," Captain Jack urged sympathetically. "I might be able to give you a lift, y'know; and I'm sure I'd be glad to."

But Smith shook his head. "No; I've got over that Ancient Mariner feeling," he said. "I reckon I'll buck the game single-handed—for a while longer, anyway. If it was my own affair altogether, I wouldn't mind shouting it from the housetops. But it isn't. And there's just a chance that I might breed a peck of trouble for you, too, if I let you mix in. No; it's me for the lone trail yet a while. If things come right," he muttered, staring straight into the flame of the lamp on the table beside him, "I'll have the kinks in a mighty crooked trail straightened out by and by."

He puffed at his cigar, wrinkling his brows in thought, and continued to keep his eyes fixed steadily on the lamp, like a man whose mind was on distant things. And Stone smoked in silence, watching closely the play of expression on the features of his guest. It was not his right nor his desire to force a confidence. If Smith had a story to tell—and of that Captain Jack felt sure—he would tell it voluntarily, or not at all. The fact that it was likely to bear strongly on the brothers Boland, and perhaps on their sister, only served to increase Stone's natural hesitancy. It was no trivial matter, he knew, that would rouse Smith to the fighting pitch, and Captain Jack was a close enough observer of his fellow men to know that Smith's feeling was genuine.

"Ah, well," Smith said listlessly, "it's rather petty of me to whine. I'm sorry I exploded to-night. I had no business to thrust my personal affairs under your nose, captain. I think I'll be going."

"You haven't bothered me in the least, old chap," Stone assured him sincerely. "I'd be jolly glad to do anything I could for you."

"Don't make any rash promises,"

Smith warned lightly, with a return of his old careless manner as he rose to go. "You don't know where it might lead you. Suppose I took you up on that, and it carried you to a point where you had to choose between friendship and duty, what then?"

"By Jove! that would be rather embarrassing," the captain admitted. "But I fancy such a situation isn't likely to arise."

"Hardly," Smith returned, as he stepped outside. "Still, you never can tell."

With which enigmatical remark he passed into the night and was gone. Captain Jack finished his cigar and turned in, wondering just what sort of a tangled skein was woven about the Bolands and Smith. There was Brooks, too.

"By Jove! I'd forgotten Brooks," Captain Jack reflected, stretched comfortably in bed. "That was another beggar from across the line who knew Smith, and Smith had to kill him. And Smith evidently knows more about these people than he lets on; while they take jolly good care to keep out of his way. I wonder what the deuce it's all about!"

And still wondering, Captain Jack turned over and fell asleep.

Afternoon of the next day brought a belated mail delivery, and within an hour of its arrival a bull train heaved up from the horizon on the Assiniboine trail. Dark wrapped the Hills before it reached the post, but the Force had learned from a scout that it was a Baker freight outfit from Benton, and by these signs and tokens the two hundred redcoats and the refugees from the range knew that the time of stolen stock and burned homesteads was at an end.

Captain Jack was on active duty that day. Not till "Stables" sounded did he have as much as a breathing spell. And it was well after seven o'clock when he sat him down in his quarters and sorted over the bundles of letters the long-delayed mail had brought. Some he laid aside. A few he opened and glanced hastily over. Three bearing English postmarks—one of them a long, official-looking envelope—he read and reread. Then he laid them down on the table, and leaning back in his chair clasped both hands behind his head and blew smoke rings at the ceiling.

"My word, but this is surprising," he mused. "Never expected *that* old duffer to remember me—never. Lord! Twenty thousand pounds all in a lump—that's forty years' pay for a captain in the Police." He chuckled quietly at the comparison. "Shall I, or shan't I, go home?"

He continued to stare at the ceiling. After a long interval, he spoke again, murmuring aloud the thoughts that took shape in his mind.

"I'll stick it out a while longer," he decided. "And I think I shall just keep mum about this remarkable windfall. Uncle Mort, you poor, old, dead, and gone beggar, I must say you've done the handsome thing by me."

With that Captain Jack bundled the letters into a drawer, and set out for the major's wifeless domicile.

He found that peppery old veteran wading through a mass of correspondence. The major waved him to a chair, indicated with a motion of his hand a tray bearing a decanter and glasses, and continued to slit envelopes and read. In a few minutes he grunted, and tossed to Captain Jack a letter.

"Cast your eye over that," he growled. "I shall just let you attend to the matter."

The captain set down his glass, and extracted the bulky contents of the envelope. There was a typewritten communication and a dozen or more printed handbills. The handbills were neatly folded. Captain Jack laid them aside and glanced over the letter. He read it a second time. Then he picked up one of the printed slips, spread it out, and this is what greeted his eyes:

$2,000 REWARD.

The authorities of Douglas County, Nebraska, will pay the foregoing sum for the apprehension, or information leading to the arrest, of Paul Hartley, alias James Brookfield, alias Piano Jim. Is wanted for em-

bezzlement and looting of $200,000 cash and securities from Merchant's National Bank of Omaha, Neb.

Description: Height, five foot ten inches; weight, about 170 pounds; squarely built. Eyes, brown; hair, brown; brown mustache —sometimes wears beard of same color. Regular features; pleasant voice. Age, 33 —looks younger. Splendid education. Brilliant pianist; fond of playing classical music. Good horseman; fair shot. Last heard of in Colorado; playing in dance hall at Gunnison City; known there as "Piano" Jim.

The captain took up the letter of the Douglas County sheriff and perused it once more. It ran:

Commander, Fort Walsh, N. W. T.

SIR: I enclose herewith description of a man very much wanted in Omaha, whom we have made unsuccessful attempts to capture. On account of the fact that he is known to be in possession of the greater part of the amount stolen, his arrest is an important consideration.

We have traced his movements for two years through the Southwest, Colorado, Wyoming, and Idaho—mostly through his piano-playing. The man is a musical fiend; cannot keep his hands off a piano; his playing always excites remark. Last winter he managed to elude arrest, and disappeared completely. Have had all American ports closely watched, and have concluded that he must have taken refuge in Canadian territory. So have forwarded all information at hand and ask your assistance in locating this man. Am informed that the Mounted Police have excellent facilities for tracing fugitives in the Northwest.

Since printing enclosed handbills, reward has been increased to $3,000. Am very anxious to get this man, regardless of reward. Hoping that you will be enabled to apprehend him if located in your jurisdiction, I am, very truly yours, A. B. KOUNTZ,
Sheriff, Douglas County, Neb.

Captain Jack folded letter and posters and stowed the entire collection in his pocket.

"My word," he silently reflected, "this looks bad for Smith."

He helped himself to another glass of port, and tried to put the matter out of his mind. But it would not down. He could not deny that the description fitted, and with the "Moonlight Sonata" looming large in his recollection, the captain's logical mind could not avoid certain deductions. But for all that, he hesitated to believe that Smith was the man.

VII.

Evidently the letter from Omaha slipped from the major's memory, for in the morning he ordered Captain Jack on a tour of inspection that embraced Medicine Lodge and Pend d'Oreille, two outposts from which Fort Walsh had been comparatively cut off. A sergeant and four men garrisoned each place. The Lodge was fifty miles due west, and Pend d'Oreille lay seventy miles in an air line to the southwest—a four days' trip at the shortest. So Captain Jack took a squad of troopers, fitted up a supply wagon, and set about his mission without making a move in the Omaha affair. Not that he was minded to shirk the issue, for he held that if Smith was the man, and the guilty man, he had no right to shield him, whatever his personal feelings might be. But the captain reasoned that it was folly to post up those printed slips; such a move would simply result in warning Hartley, alias Brookfield, alias Piano Jim, to quit the country.

Captain Jack had another reason. He wanted to put it squarely to Smith, man to man, feeling sure that Smith's manner and actions would either confirm or absolutely disprove the suspicions that the captain could not get away from. The captain had been in the business of man-hunting just long enough to know that circumstantial evidence is not always so damning as it appears. But it certainly looked black for Smith.

It occurred to Captain Jack that Smith had steadfastly refused to touch a piano since coming to the post. Stone had spoken tentatively once or twice of having him play, but in each instance Smith had put forward some excuse; and the captain had never told his fellow officers of the man's marvelous talent, preferring to have them hear for themselves. So that no one at Walsh beyond himself and Smith knew of the "Moonlight Sonata" played at the Powell ranch.

As far as the description went, in the absence of a clear-cut photograph

—and Captain Jack wondered why the sheriff had omitted that important detail—it tallied with Smith well enough. But again it might be applied to many another man. Either of the Bolands, he reflected, would answer to it, and so would any one of a dozen men in the Force—but none of them, so far as he was aware, had a pronounced talent for rendering difficult music on a piano, or any other instrument. And he had listened to Smith.

In any case, Captain Jack decided that the surest way to capture a fugitive was to notify every post in the Territories to keep a quiet lookout for such a man, and use the Omaha posters for waste paper. And when he had arrived at this decision Captain Jack was able to proceed about his outpost inspection without further puzzling his brain over the affair.

When, on the evening of the fourth day, he drew near Fort Walsh, there was a marked change in the outward appearance of the post. The tents of the refugees, their wagons and horses, had vanished. With the back of the rebellion broken, and assured of ample police protection, the stockmen had returned to their ranches. Barring the freighters from over the line, the post was denuded of the civilian element. Even the Bolands, he learned at mess, had betaken themselves across the Hills to seek a permanent location, and there was mourning among the shoulder-strap contingent, for Dorothy had gone with her brothers.

Captain Jack finished his supper thoughtfully, went to his quarters, and straightway to bed. In the morning he sought the corrals where Smith held forth at his horse breaking. But Smith was not there. The corrals were silent and empty.

Captain Jack asked a trooper, and the man spoke of Smith being gone, he did not know where. The captain hied him to the quartermaster's office, and learned that Smith had turned in the last of the bronchos, tamed and saddle-wise, drawn his pay, and gone to Fish Creek with Powell.

"Confound it!" Stone said to himself. "I can't delay this thing any longer. Here goes, Smith—which I fancy isn't your name at all—old chap. If you aren't the beggar that's wanted, you won't be hurt."

He proceeded next to the building where the officer of the day was to be found. Once there, it was a simple matter to have an orderly gather the sergeants. When they were assembled in the anteroom, Captain Jack told them of the reward, and repeated to them the description of the much-wanted man from Omaha; and when the clerk had furnished each sergeant a pen copy of all the information in the captain's hands, the sergeants scattered to post the corporals, who would in turn pass it on to the troopers, till every policeman in Fort Walsh knew the crime, description, and accomplishments of Hartley, Brookfield, Piano Jim, for whom the sheriff of Douglas County was willing to pay three thousand dollars in cold cash. But Captain Jack did not tell them that *he* knew a man in the Hills, an American, and likewise the slayer of a Mounted Policeman, whose fingers could coax marvelous harmonies from the strings of a piano.

That afternoon Major Herrin, who worked his best-loved officers the hardest, and whose orders fell as unexpectedly as lightning out of a clear sky, set Captain Jack at the head of thirty riders and bade him fare forth to Medicine Hat, Seven Persons' Creek, and Chin Coulée, and bring in any men, red or white, whom he found lurking in lonely places and unable to give a clear account of themselves.

This task the captain performed under high pressure. His gait was that of a man in haste. It was a saddle-weary bunch of troopers that followed at his heels, when he again returned to the post—and it took a world of hard riding to bother the steel-wire men who wore the queen's scarlet in those turbulent days along the line.

Tough as they were, Captain Jack was tougher. And he was wearied with an idea, and keen to put it to a test. So he tarried at the post only long enough to extract from the major

a grudging three days' leave of absence, and saddle a fresh horse. Then he rode over the Hills to the north.

At sundown he dismounted in the Powell ranch yard. Smith met him at the stable. They shook hands. Smith showed the captain where to put his horse. Powell came up, greeted him, and hurried away to bid his wife prepare the captain a bite to eat. It took but a few minutes to care for the captain's mount, and that done Smith at once led the way to the house.

Powell ushered them into the big room where Captain Jack had heard Smith play. He sat down and glanced about while exchanging comments with Powell and his wife. There was something lacking in the room; something that the trappings of permanent occupation did not account for. Just what it was the captain could not exactly sense; the appearance of the room was familar, and yet there was a change. Stone's perception was normally rather acute, but for some reason he did not at once become aware of a rather obvious fact. It was several minutes before he realized just what was missing. Then he noticed that the piano was gone from its corner.

"By Jove! y'know," he said to Powell, with one eye on Smith. "I seem to remember you having a piano here —in this room, I mean."

"Sure," Powell returned. "We had a dandy. Used to stand over in that corner there. Darn me, I had one hell of a time gettin' that thing into this country—cost me the price uh quite a bunch uh steers, that there musical jigger did. The wife's sister played it; played it mighty fine, she did, too. But she got plumb sick uh this country about a year after she'd hornswoggled me into gettin' that pianner, and went back home. They ain't a soul on the ranch can do more'n make a damn poor collection uh noise on it—so a while back when one uh these here Bolands that's located over in the Basin come along and offered me good money for it, why, I just let her go—and throwed in a lot uh what Emily called 'the clossicks' to boot. That's why yuh don't see no pianner, captain. She's done departed from Fish Creek. They claim that yeller-headed Boland girl can sure paw the ivory, but I ain't heard her perform none yet."

The captain glanced curiously at Smith, and Smith returned the look, smiling frankly when Powell declared that no one on the ranch could make more than a "damn poor collection uh noise." Evidently Smith had kept his fingers in his pockets and said nothing of his musical ability. And that served to heighten Captain Jack's impression that only in an unguarded moment had he been privileged to hear Smith play.

Powell changed the subject before long. As a horse owner he had suffered considerable loss while cooped in Fort Walsh, and that furnished him a theme upon which he enlarged until late in the evening. When it dawned upon him that it was time to sleep, he lugged forth a huge roll of bedding and spread it on the floor.

"Here yuh are, captain," he said. "You'll have to bunk right here for lack uh better accommodation. Smith he sleeps here, too. I guess I'll turn in, m'self. Good night." And closing the door behind him he left Smith and the captain alone.

Smith's bed, folded in its canvas cover, lay in one corner. He spread it out and sitting upon it drew off one boot and let it fall to the floor with a thump. The other was still in his hand when Captain Jack, squatted opposite, arrested his movement with a remark.

"I say, Smith," he uttered bluntly. "Just read this, will you?" And he held out one of the printed slips from Omaha.

Smith reached for it, glanced at the heading, laid his boot gently on the floor, and read the poster carefully. The captain watched his face, its faintest change of expression easily seen in the full, yellow glare of the lamp. But there was no change. Not a muscle quivered, nor did the dark eyes show aught but a certain whimsical flicker that was neither surprise nor fear.

Captain Jack was no whit the wiser

for his study of Smith's face; either the man was secure in the knowledge that he had done no wrong, or he was gifted with self-control that defied all emotions. And that Captain Jack doubted, remembering his look as he held Dorothy Boland's head in his arms in the buffalo wallow.

"Well," he said presently, looking the captain squarely in the eye as he handed back the paper, "they want him bad, I reckon. Two thousand dollars' worth, they say. What do you think of it? Don't you suppose that if he'd got away with that sized sum he'd be pretty hard to catch by now?"

"I don't know what to think of it," Stone replied soberly. "Y'know, we had word from the sheriff, besides the posters, giving a few bits of information that don't appear there. It seems they almost had him, not so long ago, but he gave 'em the slip—and now he's supposed to have crossed the line."

Smith made himself a cigarette before he uttered further comment. But when he did speak he gave the captain a jolt. It sounded almost like defiance.

"You don't reckon I might be the jasper?" he laughed softly. "I look as if I might be packing a quarter of a million or so around in my clothes, don't I?"

The idea seemed to amuse him vastly, for he continued to chuckle; and the captain struck back in the same semi-bantering tone.

"Pianists who really *can* play are pretty rare in this sort of a country," he drawled. "And I heard you that day, you recollect."

"That's so," Smith responded, and it seemed to Captain Jack that he was coolly deliberate in his words. "And you have probably noticed that I've been rather backward about playing since that time, eh? Well, I dare say when a man appears suddenly from nowhere in particular and he tallies to a certain description, and everything points conclusively to his being the man wanted—why, it does look bad, now doesn't it? What are you going to do about it?"

"Why, nothing, of course," Captain Jack passed it up lightly. He wanted a little more time in which to adjust his ideas. Smith was unreadable, and in the face of the man's attitude and the evidence at hand the captain was at sea.

"Let's sleep on it, then," said Smith. "In the morning maybe—well, we'll see."

He undressed, drew the blankets over him, and turned his back on Stone. The captain squatted on his bedding for a long time. He was no nearer seeing light than before. If Smith were really a fugitive embezzler, he was certainly a cool hand. The captain had developed a sincere liking for Smith, but he tried to keep the personal equation in the background. Was Smith the man? That Captain Jack could not decide. And as there was little use sitting up all night puzzling his brain over the thing, he blew out the lamp and followed Smith's example.

But he did not sleep. Without being able to convince himself that he was lying within six feet of an outlaw upon whose head a price was set, he could not get rid of a dim notion that Smith would quietly vanish at the first opportunity.

Captain Jack's wakefulness left him suddenly an hour before daybreak, and when a sunbeam flashing in his eyes caused him to blink and look around Smith's bed was a neat roll in its accustomed corner. The captain sat up and listened a moment. There was no stir about the house.

"Five o'clock," he muttered, looking at his watch. "I wonder if my friend Smith has really decamped?"

He dressed and went outside. A horse in the corral nickered, and another answered from within the stable. Down in the rail-fenced pasture a meadowlark trilled his throaty warble among the dew-sprinkled brush. And those were the only sounds. The vast, night-refreshed plains were hushed; peace, cool and perfect, rested on the silent land, and the vagrant air currents brought whiffs of the clean earthy smell that rises from the virgin rangeland with the summer sun.

The captain thrust Smith out of his mind. He sat him down on a log with his face to the slanting sunbeams, and drank it in—for at such smiling moments he felt that the frontier was home and the wine air of the Northwest well fit for men with red blood in their veins. By noon the smiling sun would stand overhead like a ball of polished brass; the heat waves would shimmer on the baked flats; the lips and tongue of a man on the range would parch and burn till he cursed the fortune that brought him to such a God-forsaken land. All this Captain Jack knew, but it seemed not worth while considering, in those cool, refreshing hours before and after dawn.

Into his reverie Powell shortly broke, hailing the captain as he passed on his way to the stable. Stone left his log and joined him.

"Did yuh hear Smith pull out this mornin'?" Powell asked.

"No, I didn't," Stone replied.

"I just wondered how early he started out," Powell went on, while he busied himself with feeding two or three saddle horses. "I told him to pull out soon as he could an' go over toward the Basin after a bunch uh horses that's driftin' too far west. But I didn't aim to have him go before breakfast. Well, he knows where the grub is. Maybe he got him a bite. He's sure an ambitious son-of-a-gun, that same Smith. He knows his business. He can handle horses to perfection, singly or in bunches, and all yuh got to do is tell him to go ahead."

Thus, till breakfast was ready, Powell chanted the praises of his newest horse wrangler, and Captain Jack listened perforce, though the Smith riddle was beginning to irritate his usually placid mind. As soon as he had eaten, he bade Powell's ranch a curt adieu and rode west—toward the Graburn Basin. He had learned from Powell just where the Boland place was located.

The Mounted Policeman, from the latest recruit to the chief commissioner, is mounted to cover ground. Hence, though twenty miles lay between, Captain Jack reached the Gow Flat while the forenoon was yet an infant. The Flat spreads like a meadow on either side of a brawling willow-and-poplar-fringed creek; and near this creek, at the upper end of the Flat, Walt and Tom Boland had built their home—a sod-roofed, log-walled cabin, big and bare and rough inside and out.

New and raw as it was, it held the lodestone that had really drawn Captain Jack Stone from over the Hills, and his heart fluttered a mite faster at sight of the place. He looked eagerly for glimpses of a feminine presence as he approached. And having eyes for only one thing, he rounded a new-built corral and a half-finished stable and came near passing unheeded an orange-buckskin horse tied to a post. But the sweat grime, the sign of hard riding, had dried dirty white on the neck and shoulders and lean flanks of the beast, and when Captain Jack took a second look he drew rein and stared. For, though the horse carried the Powell brand, and therefore bore no special significance to Captain Jack, the saddle and bridle and the Winchester slung under the right stirrup leather he recognized as Smith's.

VIII.

He held up his horse for a few seconds, regarding the other with a keen interest. He knew he was not mistaken, for during the horse-breaking at the post he had become familiar with Smith' rather elaborate outfit; but he was casting about for the cause of its owner's presence in a neighborhood that was distinctly hostile.

From the very beginning, Captain Jack had been convinced that the Boland brothers and Smith lacked only slight provocation to be at each other's throats; whatever had happened in the past—of which none of these people spoke freely—to breed such bitterness, the feeling was there, repressed for the most part, but nevertheless powerful, and so it seemed odd that Smith's horse should stand quietly tied to the Boland corral. The peculiarity was accentuated,

Captain Jack thought, since the warning he had served on Smith the night before. At all events, Smith was not making a breakneck flight from threatened arrest. Stone shrugged his shoulders at last, and rode on to the cabin.

Smith stood just within the threshold when the captain dismounted at the door. The girl was sitting on an upended box, her hands clasped in her lap. A look of pure relief flashed over her face as she rose to greet Captain Jack; an evanescent expression, but he caught it and wondered why. Smith stood by silent, except for a short "How-do," and when the others had shaken hands, he put on his hat.

"I think I'll be going," he announced briefly. "I'll see you again in a day or two, captain, maybe. So-long."

"I wish you'd wait a bit," Captain Jack interposed quickly. "I'd rather like to continue our last night's conversation, if you don't mind."

"Not here," Smith demurred, and his face lit up with a mocking smile. "I don't know that I'm what you'd call a welcome guest, and our talk *fiesta* might be rudely busted up. No, we'll talk that over later. I'll be easy found when I'm wanted." And without further parley he turned his back on them.

Captain Jack and Dolly Boland watched him stride to the corral, untie his horse, and swing easily into the saddle. He rode up the little creek a hundred yards, crossed it, and bore away toward Fish Creek. His gait was unhurried, leisurely. When the rolling hills that run to the edge of the Gow Flat hid him, Captain Jack and Dolly looked at each other again, and the captain's glance was more searching than at first. There were traces of tears on the girl's face. Her red mouth lacked its habitual smiling curves, and the blue eyes held a wistful look that went straight to the heart of Captain Jack. He felt a sudden surge of resentment against Smith.

"Has that mysterious beggar been worrying you?" he demanded impulsively. "You look quite upset."

She gave him a startled glance. "No, no," she exclaimed. "Why should he? What makes you think that?"

"Just the way you look," he persisted, coming a little closer to her. "Perhaps I'm mistaken, but you do look as if you'd been bullied—and I don't like to think of that, you know. I don't know just how you people and Smith stand, but I won't have him making you miserable. I rather like the beggar, myself; I hope you haven't any reason to be afraid of him."

"Afraid of him?" she echoed, and it seemed to the captain that she was making an effort to pass it off lightly. "I don't think he's dangerous, do you? You see, I happen to know him a little better than you, perhaps." She laughed a bit uncertainly. "That's a poor compliment to my nerve, Captain Stone, to insinuate that I'm afraid of a mere man just because I happen to look a little out of sorts when he is here. Did you ever have a downright bad headache, captain?"

"Once or twice," he confessed. "They're beastly things, too. Have you one now?"

"It's gone; but I've been coping with a simon-pure case of neuralgia all morning," she said. "Won't you sit down?"

She pushed forward a rude, homemade chair. Captain Jack, baffled in his attempt to get a line on Smith, laid his hat on the table and seated himself. Dolly resumed her box seat. Suddenly finding himself at a loss for words, the captain took refuge in a casual survey of the room, and almost the first thing his gaze encompassed was the Powell grand, backed against the rough log wall.

"By Jove!" he said. "Powell told me you'd got the piano, I remember. Don't you think it has a stunning tone, that instrument? I heard——" he stopped short. For a while yet, he decided, it might be well to keep that to himself. "Won't you play something for me?" he requested abruptly. "I'm very fond of music."

"I love it," she said simply, and getting up went over to the piano. Captain Jack followed her. He stood be-

side her, and, reaching over, turned the sheets as she played. And she *could* play.

Thus an hour passed. Outside the door, Captain Jack's forgotten horse no longer dozed on three legs, his head lazily drooping, but stood squarely on his four feet, sentient ears pricked up to catch the rising and falling waves of melody that the supple fingers awoke. Within, his master stood at the player's elbow, asking no more than to stand close by and listen, while he watched the curve of a soft cheek and the graceful movements of two shapely sunbrowned hands.

After a time she struck up a piece from memory, and Captain Jack, relieved of score-turning, stood by the piano end and fingered absently a pile of music on top of the case. He let the edges flip from under his fingers, one by one, and as they fluttered, the title page of the "Moonlight Sonata" appeared for a moment. A short search brought the complete score to light, and he drew it eagerly from the mass. When Dolly had finished, he placed the "Sonata" on the rack before her.

"By Jove! I've made a find. Won't you play this for me, please?" he asked.

She turned the leaves over silently, and Captain Jack waited. After a little she straightened the sheets and began to play. Her fingers twinkled along the keyboard; a false note jarred in the harmony, and with a suppressed, impatient exclamation she began again —only to break off halfway down the first page and sweep the score from the piano with a sudden, passionate gesture.

"I can't play it; I won't!" she burst out. "I hate it—I hate it!"

She sprang up from the stool, her breast heaving in the grip of some keen emotion, and Captain Jack, at sight of the tears gathering in the blue eyes into which he had looked too often for his peace of mind, let the primitive, protecting, dominant man in him leap to the surface, and took her swiftly into his arms. And there for a few seconds she nestled like some hunted thing that had found shelter.

"Dear girl," Captain Jack whispered, "if you care for me a little bit, tell me what's bothering you, and I'll see that it ceases. If you have any troubles, they're mine now."

He tilted back the blonde head and bent to kiss her; but she shrank from his caress and pushed him away.

"Oh, we're both mad, I think," she cried despairingly. "I am, I know. I'm a poor, weak fool, or I'd never have broken down like this. And you mustn't care anything about me, Captain Jack, you mustn't."

"I love you," he declared bluntly, and held her firmly so that she was forced to look straight into his eyes. "I think I've done that all along. Don't you care for me at all? Tell me that! But I know you do; I feel that, somehow. Isn't it so, dear?"

"I have no right," she wailed. "Oh, but you'll hate me when I tell you. Let me go, Captain Jack. I should have told you before. I wanted to, and yet —I was afraid, I was afraid. I haven't the right to care for you, nor to permit you to care for me—do you see that?"

She had slipped out of his arms, and now held up her hand, on one finger of which gleamed the plain, gold band that Captain Jack had noticed once or twce before.

"Do you see that? Do you know what it means?" she said, and there was a world of misery, of resentment, in her tone. "How can I listen to you when I'm already another man's wife?"

"Is that really true?" he asked doubtingly; and in spite of him a trace of harshness crept into his voice. She shrank at the change, slight as it was.

"Too true," she answered wearily. "I can't explain, and it doesn't really matter why I've let you think otherwise; but, oh, I'm sorry, Captain Jack, I am. And yet you're partly to blame. I'd never, never have let you tell me this if you hadn't insisted on my playing that devilish 'Sonata.' I hate it—every note of it!"

Captain Jack leaned against the piano, and stared at her like a man partly stunned.

"I'll own you've jolted me pretty hard," he muttered gloomily. "I can't seem to get the right of it, somehow. But I don't blame you, y'know. I dare say you had good reasons. It's jolly hard on a fellow, though, to see his cherished air castles tumbled into a precious heap of ruins. I thought—and I can't help my being an ass, y'know, to think such things—that you had a corner in your heart for me, and I made such jolly fine plans. Lord, what a mess we do make of things sometimes!"

Dolly came close to him, and laid a hand on his arm.

"Listen," she said pleadingly. "It's done, and I can't help it, but I did try to avoid it, for I was afraid—a woman isn't always blind, Captain Jack. But how—what could I do? If you only knew—if you could just go back over the last three years with me, you'd understand. You must forget about this—unless the wheel of fate turns right; and it seldom does. So you must go away, and keep away—from me. And if you'll go now before my brothers come it'll save me a few white lies. And—and one can't tell—if I should—should send for you some time, would you forgive me, and come then?"

"Will I?" he answered gravely. "From the other side of the world if you call me. But don't you think I might help you now if you'd tell me a little more?"

She shook her head. "I can't," she replied sadly. "It would do no good, and it is a painful subject."

"Ah, well," he sighed, "I dare say I'd better be going. My word, this will seem like a dreary old world for a while."

She muttered something that Captain Jack did not hear. He turned to the table to get his hat, and, as he faced about, a pair of soft arms fell lightly on his shoulders and warm, moist lips were pressed for an instant to his cheek. Then, with a little gasping cry, she eluded his outstretched arms—a door slammed, and she was gone.

He stood for nearly a minute staring fixedly after her. He called her name, and there was no answer. Absently he went out to his horse, mounted, and rode away, stirred to the depths and sore of heart. With his cheek still tingling from that passionate kiss, he spurred recklessly across the gray-green ridges, straight toward the post. And as he tore along, the vast silence of the ranges, the eternal peace of the quiet Hills, brooding purple in the distance, brought a degree of comfort to his troubled soul. There was none to see or hear when Captain Jack swung from his sweating horse on a hillside, and threw himself face downward in the nodding grass. Only the bald, blue sky and the sun looked down, as they have peered unmoved for eons on the sorrows of men.

IX.

Born of the fierce noonday heat, a purring breeze swept along the ridge top and recalled Captain Jack to matter-of-fact existence. He sat up. It was seven hours since he had breakfasted, and now a sense of hunger came upon him, and to dull it he resorted to the range rider's solace. His cigarette made, he mounted and jogged slowly toward the Hills. With the keen edge of his hurt somewhat blunted, the tantalizing puzzle of the Bolands and Smith arose to perplex him.

"I dare say," he reflected, "I ought to take my medicine like a man, and forget the whole business. If Smith's the fugitive from Omaha, he'll get to the end of his rope by and by, cool hand as he is. But that wouldn't solve the problem for her and me. That looks like a pretty hopeless mess, if she told me right. There's something downright queer about the whole business. Damn it! I don't see how I can do anything; I simply can't do a thing but wait. If I could get Smith cornered and whack the beggar over the head with a club till he told me what *he* knows—but he isn't the sort of chap one could handle that way. Jack Stone, you've set your feet in a devilish stony road, I'm afraid. And about all you can do is grin and peg along."

The divide he was following south to the foot of the Cypress range ran parallel to a creek that split the Graburn Basin fair in the centre. He veered a little to the west and dropped to lower ground to shorten his course; then crossing two coulées that lay in his path, brought up on the brink of the valley in which the creek flowed.

A steep-banked affair it was, the wall on his side some five or six hundred feet high, a precipitous earthen cliff, the opposite one a more gradual slope, and the width of the bottom between approximated three hundred yards. Over this floorlike level the stream curved in a shallow channel, and its windings were patched with brush, willow and poplar, and cherry scrub.

Up on top, where Captain Jack rode, the land ran back in a gentle rise to the ridges. A rider on this plateau could look down into the box of a valley, and nothing that moved therein could escape his notice. And thus it happened that Captain Jack, jogging parallel to the creek, observed, through a notch in the bank where a mass of earth had slipped away, a rider tearing along a mile up the brush-dotted bottom, and rode nearer to see what might be the cause of his haste.

The man showed only for an instant after the captain drew near enough to look over into the valley. He crossed an open space and plunged into a grove of poplars. From this he did not emerge, though Stone watched closely for his reappearance, and while he watched he saw a bunch of range horses, broom-tail mares with foals at foot, come galloping down the opposite slope, following a coulée that would bring them into the creek a short distance above where the man had concealed himself—if he were concealed.

A rider loped close on their trail, and it struck Captain Jack that it must be Smith—even at the distance that separated them there was no mistaking the odd color of his mount, the tawny yellow that gleamed in the sunshine like old gold.

The man in the brush made no move from his cover, and the half-wild horses kept straight on, barely slacking their speed as they plunged down the steep bank. Captain Jack sat still and peered over the edge, well aware that he was practically invisible—at least, to the man in the poplars—for little more than the top of his head could be seen from below. He was somewhat curious, and wished he had brought a field glass. He was not certain of either man, and the action of the first was certainly rather odd.

The rider of the buckskin horse vanished for a second behind a point and came into sight again riding out of a coulée mouth onto the creek bottom somewhat farther up. The horses had halted at the stream to drink. Just as the yellow horse wheeled fairly into the flat a wisp of smoke puffed from among the poplars, and the man in the open dropped from his saddle with a swiftness that bordered on the unnatural. But he fell, and fell simultaneously with the report of the gun.

"The damned assassin!" Captain Jack gasped. "That's why he hid and waited. My word, but I'll take a hand in this game myself."

But Captain Jack's intentions, though the best in the world, were not to be put in practice immediately. A long, sheer cutbank debarred him from heading straight into the bottom, which was his first impulse. From the top he was powerless, at least while the would-be killer kept to the brush.

He stood on the brink and glared down, debating whether to go back to the lower end of the long valley wall or advance and descend at a point near the poplars. And just as he decided to go up the creek and risk getting potted as he rode down, another smoke puff spurted—but this time from the vicinity of the man who had tumbled so hastily from the back of the yellow horse. The faint crack, like to the snapping of a dry stick, floated up to Captain Jack, and at once from the poplars came staccato answer.

"Whether that's Smith or not, he evidently didn't get his light put out first shot," the captain thought as he put his horse on a run for the nearest

place where he could get down. "I didn't think he fell like a man badly hurt."

That fact was apparent, for though he was forced to swerve away from the bank and could no longer look down into the bottom, he could hear them pecking industriously away at each other.

A minute or two before Stone reached the spot where the cutbank ran out into a climable slope, they ceased shooting. No further sound arose from the bottom, and Stone took the hill with a rush.

As his mount scrambled down, slipping precariously on the smooth, dry herbage, Captain Jack saw from the elevation that the unhorsed one was crawling carefully through the long grass toward the poplar grove.

He pulled up his horse and considered the situation afresh. He was within easy rifle range, and had the advantage of a semi-bird's-eye view. To be sure, he made a very good mark himself, sitting there on the bald hill, but that was a contingency that Captain Jack did not dwell on overmuch. He was genuinely moved at what seemed to him a deliberate attempt to murder, and he calculated that from his position he could be more sure of stopping the man concealed—should he make a dash for it—than could the other who was creeping up on his antagonist through the long grass. With his carbine resting in the hollow of his arm, Captain Jack stood his ground and awaited developments.

The man in the open had wormed his way almost to the edge of the poplars. And while Stone's gaze was focused intently on the scene below, a bullet kicked up a spurt of dust directly under the belly of his horse, ricochetted, and went its way with a whine. The startled brute gave a snort, jumped, and slid twenty feet downhill before he regained his footing.

The report was weak, but plain enough to indicate the direction whence it came. Captain Jack looked quickly to the opposite bank. Away across, poised on the edge of a coulée, a rider stood plain against the hillside. For a moment only was he visible, then the gulch swallowed him.

Fighting mad clear through, Captain Jack drove in the steel and tore down the bank, crossing the narrow bottom at top speed. Smith—it was Smith—he passed near enough to be sure of that—sprang to his feet and called to him, but Captain Jack meant to corral the man who was so free with his bullets, and he had no time to parley. He had grasped the fact that the fellow had by some means got out of the clump of poplars and gained the benchland unseen by either himself or Smith—not caring, evidently, to match himself against the two of them at close quarters.

He spurred his panting horse up the opposite bank, and a little way from the summit dismounted on a knoll, whence he had a fair outlook over the network of coulées that ran down from the western ridges.

Presently the thing happened for which Captain Jack was waiting with his carbine cocked. The rider slipped out of one coulée, and went loping across the narrow plateau that separated him from the shelter of the next, and when he was fairly in the open, Captain Jack drew a bead on him, resting one elbow steadily on his knee and squinting along sights that were raised to eight hundred yards. It was a long shot, an almost impossible shot under the conditions, and Stone gave a whoop of pure exultation—for the horse dropped as if knocked down with a club.

The captain sent home another cartridge with a thrust of the carbine lever and stood up. So, at the same instant, did the rider whose mount he had just disabled—and thereat Captain Jack squatted in the grass again and fired vindictively at the man. But the range was too great for the size of the target, good shot as Stone was, and two or three wasted bullets convinced him of this.

Unintimidated by the firing, the man was bent over the fallen horse, busy at something the purpose of which Cap-

tain Jack could not tell. Now he broke for the nearest coulée on a run, carrying a bulky object, and Stone turned to his own horse to mount and follow.

As he thrust his foot into the stirrup, Smith reached the top of the creek bank, and the hoofs of the yellow horse drummed close behind Captain Jack as he raced up the slope. The two were abreast when they slacked speed at the dead horse, and noted that the saddle was gone.

"He ducked into this coulée," Stone called to Smith. "I fancy we can get him if we look sharp." He kept on to the cañon on a brisk lope. Smith followed.

It was only a short distance to the brink of the narrow gulch, and there they halted. Far up as they could see and down to where it joined the main creek, the floor of the gully was thick-grown with a tangled mass of brush, almost impassable to a man on horseback.

"He's somewhere in that," Captain Jack declared. "By Jove, it's a nasty looking place!"

"He picked a good hole to hide, all right," Smith observed, and wheeled his buckskin a rod or so back from the edge. "We couldn't locate him in a thousand years—and I don't know that I care to try. It would be as good as he'd want, to have me come piking down that hill. Better not show up too free, old-timer. I reckon he's not above taking another whack at you; I imagine he's sore at you for buying into this."

Stone turned back reluctantly. It was a hopeless case, and he knew it; only a foolhardy soul would attempt to come upon a desperate man in that natural ambush.

"The beggar came near hitting me over there, confound him," he said. "How did he manage to get out of those poplars without one of us seeing him? And what the devil is it all about, anyway, Smith?"

"I reckon he sneaked down the creek while I was crawling up on the other side, and you were back where you couldn't see. Once he got into a coulée mouth it was easy for him to get on the bench," Smith replied, passing up the last question entirely. "I think he must have caught sight of you coming. I sure played in luck that he didn't get me first shot; I felt the wind of the bullet. He's a good shot, that gentle *hombre.*"

"You knew him, then?" Captain Jack regarded him in some surprise; but Smith was looking toward the carcass of the dead horse.

"I think so," he answered carelessly. "Let's take a look at his *caballo.*"

They urged their horses close to the prone brute. A raw, red patch disfigured one shoulder.

"The gentleman played safe when he saw a policeman on deck," Smith commented, sitting sidewise in his saddle and calmly rolling a cigarette—albeit he was keeping a watchful eye on the country behind. "Didn't leave any incriminating evidence to speak of, did he?"

"I should say not," Captain Jack agreed, leaning over and looking closely. "The beggar not only took his saddle and bridle along, but actually cut out the bit of hide that carried the brand. My word! Nervy chap, too; I was trying to drop him while he was doing it. Hang it, I seem to have seen this nag before."

He wrinkled his brows in puzzled thought. He knew that somewhere, some time, he had seen the horse, a rangy black, with a star in his forehead, but the time and place he could not recall.

"Maybe," Smith said laconically. Then, after a moment, as Stone still sat absorbed in cogitation: "I've got to hit the trail, or those Powell horses are likely to quit the country altogether. Are you coming along, captain, or are you headed somewhere else?"

"Eh?" Captain Jack stared at him. "Are you going to drop this thing right here, and go on as if nothing had happened?"

"Sure," Smith replied. "I'm not hunting him; he's hunting *me.* And I reckon he's had plenty for to-day."

"Then I shall have to go on to the

post and make a report of it," said Captain Jack. "Hang it, don't you object to being assassinated?"

"Don't I?" Smith straightened in his saddle with an oath, the first sign of feeling he had betrayed. "By the nine eternal gods of war, I'll put my objections on file before the world is much older! But I'm playing a lone hand—I've got to. *Sabe?* It's something of a personal affair. And if you'll take a fool's advice, it will be better all round if you keep out of it, Captain Jack."

"Indeed; and why?" the captain curtly demanded.

Smith sat silent a moment, his brown eyes fixed speculatively on Stone's face.

"On *her* account," he said softly, at last, and made a motion toward the Gow Flat.

Captain Jack reined his horse closer to Smith, his eyes narrowing with sudden anger.

"What do you mean?" he cried. "What has this to do with her? Make yourself a little clearer. By the Lord, I'm sick of hearing folk speak in riddles. What the devil is all this mystery about?"

"Coming from a suspected bank robber," Smith remarked, again resuming his habitual self-possession, "I don't suppose you'll take much stock in what I say. But this fight is between Tom and Walt Boland and myself, and for various reasons I want the Mounted Police to keep their hands off. More than that I can't tell you. But I happen to know where you and Dolly Boland stand. Do you want to take a hand in a game where you might have to kill one or both of her brothers? How would that look to her? It's my own trouble; let me settle it."

"I tell you what," Stone flung back hotly, "I don't like your manner of hinting things, and refusing to come to the point. I don't *know* why these men should be so anxious to kill you—but that's not the point. As an officer, I can't permit men to take the law into their own hands if I can prevent it. And I despise a bushwhacking assassin. Damme, Smith, if I had a bit more proof, I'd lay the lot of you by the heels, for pure spite. That poor girl would have a rest from your infernal row, then. Damme, you were bullying her this morning when I rode in. And by heavens, that's got to stop, or you'll have me to fight as well as her brothers!"

"Look here," Smith cut in sharply, "I'm not going to indulge in personalities; I've neither time nor desire. If you get into this ruction, the best you'll get is the worst of it. So you'd better keep out. And likewise you'd better get rid of that fool idea that I'm—— Oh, hell! what's the use? So-long."

He whirled the buckskin and went galloping away to the creek, out over the opposite bank of which the little herd of horses was stringing. And Captain Jack swallowed his anger, and resisted an impulse to follow Smith and force a more lucid explanation from him. He sat there half-turned in his saddle, tugging thoughtfully at one end of his fair mustache, till Smith crossed the valley and fell in behind the horses. When they swung up the far ridge, straight for the Powell ranch, Captain Jack took a last look into the scrub-lined gulch, and, seeing nothing, resumed his way to Fort Walsh.

X.

He reached the post early in the evening, and had barely finished his supper, when an orderly summoned him to headquarters.

"Heard you'd got back," the major grunted, when Stone presented himself. "Got another job for you. Mr. Kountz, Captain Stone."

Captain Jack did not at once recollect the name of the middle-aged individual who rose and shook hands with him. He did take notice, however, that Mr. Kountz was about his own height, rather lanky, somewhat stooped, and the possessor of two twinkling gray eyes separated by a thin, beaklike nose. He was no beauty, from a physical standpoint, but Captain Jack got the impression that Mr. Kountz was not a person to be lightly treated. And the major's next words made him perk up

—he remembered the signature attached to the letter from Douglas County.

"Mr. Kountz is from Omaha, Nebraska," Major Herrin went on. "Sheriff, y'know, of the county—d'ye mind the people who notified us to be on the lookout for a bank wrecker, Stone? I must say the matter had slipped my mind. I turned the thing over to you, and Dorsey tells me you sent word to all the outposts. Very good, so far as it goes. But the sheriff has positive information that the man is in this country, and he has asked me to detail some good man to work with him on the case. So you have a month's leave—which will be renewed, if necessary. Get that fellow if he's in the Territories. We've enough malefactors of our own. See that Mr. Kountz finds decent quarters. And, ah—— Well, I think that's all."

Captain Jack took the hint; he knew the major.

"Come along to my diggings, Mr. Kountz," he invited. "I fancy we'd better talk the thing over, if we're to join forces in a man-hunt."

Kountz arose and bowed with old-fashioned dignity. "I thank yuh, suh, for the invitation," he said courteously. "I shall be glad of your assistance, suh." And they bade the gruff old major good night and left him.

They strolled along the row to Captain Jack's quarters. Once there, Stone dug up a bottle of brandy, a box of cigars, and with these bachelor comforts on a table between them they settled back in their chairs and the captain came to the point at once.

"I'm jolly glad you've turned up," he began frankly. "Certain things have happened lately that I believe have more or less bearing on this case, and—— Well, I must say I've been rather interested. Now, if you'll give me some notion of what there is to work on, I dare say we shall be able to put two and two together and make it look like four. By the way, there was no photograph of this man with your printed description. You don't happen to have a picture of him about you?"

Kountz shook his head.

"I regret that I haven't, suh," he said. "That's been a serious handicap. But we've never been able to find a photograph of Hartley, except one or two taken several years back—and they don't give any true idea of his appearance. In fact, they would only serve to mislead. We've been forced to rely wholly on description—and our wits. I, however, know the damned rascal only too well. Now I reckon, suh, I'd better begin at the end of the road instead of halfway, as they say in the South. You already have a bald outline of the facts from the printed handbills. But I wish to enlist your sympathies, suh. And there are certain peculiar features bearing on the affair that I would like to tell you. We have the evening, and if you're interested, suh, I'll be glad to spin the yarn. You'll understand then why I'm prepared to follow this man from hell to Kilpatrick's and back again. I'm sure—I know he's somewhere in this country. And with the help of the Police I propose to take him out, dead or alive—and honestly, suh, I'd prefer him dead. Have I your permission to go into details?"

"Most assuredly," Captain Jack hastened to reply. "Have another nip, and fire away."

Kountz took the "nip" suggested, crossed his legs, and chewed reflectively for a moment on the end of an unlighted cigar. A shaft of light from the setting sun slipped through the west window and rested on his face, lighting up the thin, high-bridged nose, the bushy eyebrows, and the salient jaw; a fighting man's jaw, Captain Jack thought. He had not noticed particularly that feature of the sheriff's face, but now, as Kountz sat thinking, it was accentuated by a tightening of the facial muscles.

"I'm a native of Nawth Ca'lina, suh," he began presently, "and when I came to Nebraska in the early days, one of the first men I met—a man who was a friend to me in more ways than one—was a cowman on the Platte, John Boland by name."

"Boland?" Captain Jack interrupted sharply. "I beg your pardon; go ahead."

"Boland; yes, suh. In the early seventies he was a mighty rich man, a cattle king, you might say. He had four children; two boys, two girls. The girls he educated, suh, to the limit. Gave them every advantage; sent 'em East, sent 'em to Europe. But the boys had no use for anything but a hoss and a gun. He'd let 'em run with the punchers too much. And though the old man shoved a certain amount of schooling down their stubborn throats, he never could do much with them, and they stuck mostly to the range, where they could have their fling. They were pretty wild youngsters, I reckon.

"Then, suh, the Boland finances began to decline. Somehow, his business went to the dogs. He found his wealth, suh, slipping away from him. And in the middle of this my friend Boland was stricken with a fatal disease, cancer of the stomach. He consulted doctors, but they held out no hope, and he knew that his time was short. His wife had died years before. There were just the four children to divide what property was left, and he knew his boys, suh, would play merry hell with their inheritance if it were handed them in a lump. So he set his house in order, as it were. For many years his business had been done through the Merchant's National Bank. Its president was his personal friend; and in this institution, suh, he invested the funds that accrued from the sale of his herds, to the last hoof and horn. Here, then, was the situation as he arranged it: His estate amounted to two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and he willed an equal share to each of his four children. But—while the girls came into full possession at his death, the sons were to be paid only the *income* from one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, of which sum the Merchant's National was appointed trustee. Only when they had reached the age of thirty years were they to receive the principal, and relieve the bank of its trust. Do you follow me, suh?"

"Perfectly," Captain Jack replied.

"Very well." Kountz laid his cigar on the table and leaned forward earnestly. "With his affairs adjusted Boland submitted to an operation. It was a failure.

"Tom and Walt, the boys, were then about twenty-three and four; the youngest girl was nineteen. The other girl was somewhere about twenty-six, and had been married to Jim Lane, son of the Merchant's National president, a year prior to her father's death. To her was bequeathed the family home in Omaha.

"Now, the boys, suh, were helling around in the cattle country at this time. When the father died, they came home to the funeral; and when the will was read, I reckon they were badly disappointed, both in the size of the estate and the terms of the will. However, they stuck around Omaha and went a pretty fast pace on their income, and, as I happened to learn later, on certain sums raised on the strength of their prospects. The little sister thought the world of them, and kept her eyes shut to their carousing—if she ever knew of it. But Lane and his wife knew the gait they were going, and I reckon Jim Lane rounded them up in good shape more than once. Jim was paying teller in the bank.

"Suh, those girls were gifted with splendid voices. They loved music, and they knew the best. Dolly in particular made it her hobby, but Helen and her husband lacked little of being musical enthusiasts. That, I reckon, suh, was what threw Dolly Boland and Paul Hartley together. And here the Merchant's National comes in again—for Hartley came from the East to be cashier of the Merchant's National on the strength of a recommendation from a big Chicago bank. But I reckon the Chicago people didn't know his calibre, after all.

"At any rate, he was cashier, and his position naturally brought him more or less in contact with the Bolands. The boys ran with him; Lane and his

wife received him in their home; Dolly met him; he became an intimate friend of the family. And he was an attractive devil, I'll admit. You see, I knew him, too. One of these smooth, apparently straightforward men, suh, that are different when you dig down and uncover their real personality. But, as I said, he was attractive, and doubly so to these women; for he was a finished musician, an artist to his finger tips. Give him a piano and he could charm; by Heaven, suh, he could make a man *feel!* You can judge, then, how such a man, young, handsome, splendidly educated, a master of her favorite instrument and an athlete besides, would appeal to a talented, imaginative girl. Their friendship lasted a little over a year. Then the engagement was announced.

"Now, suh, if you'll pardon me for being so infernally long-winded, I'm coming to the heart of the matter. The wedding took place in August—on an August day at noon by the clock. I recollect such things most damnably well. They had decided on no honeymoon trip. That was Hartley's idea, and it developed afterward that he had good reason for keeping another man's nose out of his accounts. They went from the wedding dinner to the house that was to be their home. At five that evening Dolly walked into her sister's house, suh, and calmly told them that Paul Hartley was a knave and a beast, and she would cut her throat rather than live with him. I do not know the details, suh, but I do know that the girl was in deadly earnest. Lane and his wife tried to cool her down, but she was at white heat. Hartley came there later, a badly jolted man. She absolutely refused to see him, and Lane sent him away. He left in a fury. And by gad, suh, next morning the vault of the Merchant's National was empty of negotiable securities and cash, and Hartley had vanished from Omaha.

"A search failed to locate him. At first the evidence was purely circumstantial—the robbery was merely coincidental with his disappearance. But, mark me! a systematic examination of the books showed that he had been looting the bank funds for some months prior to the clean-up. His tangled accounts betrayed that, but the exact amount of his embezzling remains unknown, for he had made a clean sweep at the last. The total loss of the bank was nearer four hundred thousand dollars than the sum stated in the posters I sent you. It broke the Merchant's National; squashed the bank flat, suh. And the entire Boland fortune vanished into thin air. For the bulk of the estate was Merchant's National stock, and the girls had let their money remain just as their father left it. The crash of the bank swept away every dollar they had, and every vestige of property that stood in their names—barring a little bunch of hosses on the range in western Nebraska, that belonged to Dolly. Do you follow me, suh?"

Stone nodded. Curiously enough, his mind at once reverted to a remark Smith had made on the first day of their acquaintance.

"By heavens! there was a grand uproar, and a scurrying about," Kountz continued. "The city officials took hold of it, gave it up, and called in the county authorities. I have been sheriff of Douglas County three terms, suh. I took up the case gladly, for the personal equation had entered in. I aimed, suh, to do for John Boland's children what he would gladly have done for mine. On top of all that they had suffered at the hands of this man Hartley, the damned fool police suspected Jim Lane of having had a hand—I'll admit that it was a big job for one man to pull off, but they were wrong about Lane; and as for his father, the president of the Merchant's, it simply killed him. At any rate, they persecuted Jim till suddenly he and his wife left Omaha, left with scarcely a dollar to their name. Tom and Walt, suh, became men overnight. They took the little sister and pulled for the Sandhills and gathered the few hosses, about fifty head, that Dolly owned. And that was all that they saved from the wreck.

Suh, they're proud people, and when I offered, begged, suh, to stake them to half of what I had, they laughed at me. So they scattered.

"That's getting away from the point, however. I merely wished to make clear to you, suh, that I'm on no perfunctory mission.

"The thing, then, was to trace Hartley, nail him, and strip him of his plunder before he had time to squander it. I spent thousands of the county money, and a right smart sum of my own, but after months of searching I got track of him. He was in Texas, working on the range as a common hand; waiting, I reckon, for the hue and cry to die down. But an overload of whisky, and the itch of his fingers for the feel of a piano gave him away. Ever since I've been close on his trail; I, or some of my men, and, while he has always managed to evade arrest, to give us the slip at the psychological moment, I know that up to last February he had had no chance to get rid of the loot unless he gave it away. He has spent no more than a few thousand dollars; by gad! I've given him no chance to do anything but keep moving. The bulk of the securities and cash he must have yet; he may have 'em planted, but he hasn't spent 'em in riotous living.

"Now, then, last winter he turned up in Helena, Montana. One of my men had followed him from Idaho, uncertain, and afraid to arrest until he was sure. But in Helena, Hartley's inborn craving for music led him to a piano in the toughest dance hall there, and my man called the sheriff in to arrest him. And, by heavens, suh, he stood off the pair of them! There was a rough-house, and he got away; vanished, and left no signs behind. After that he was a blank, up to the time I sent word to the commanding officer here. Suh, a week after I forwarded the information that Major Herrin turned over to you, I met a Benton cowman in Omaha who put me on his track again.

"I met him by accident. A friend introduced us in the lobby of a hotel. We had a drink together, and talked of the north. By gad, suh! one thing brought up another, and it transpired that he had been in this dance hall when the attempt was made to arrest Hartley. He didn't know for what offense, and didn't inquire. But he remembered the man. The important thing, however, was this: The cowman returned to his ranch on the Marias, and a day or two later Hartley rode in and stayed overnight. You know, suh, how it is in a cow country—no man asks a traveler questions, unless he has a bone to pick with him. It was winter, and they gave him food and shelter and let it go at that. In spite of the fact that it was cold weather and the snow deep, he stayed only the night, pushing on the next morning. He told them that he was headed for the Circle ranch, forty mile down river, looking for a job; but his tracks showed one of this man's range riders, next day, that he had struck straight north, and the puncher told his boss.

"From the time Hartley showed in Helena I've had the country to the south of us pretty well covered. No results. Hence, when this cowman told me his yarn, I decided that I'd made a wise move when I notified the Mounted Police, and I took the next train north. If Paul Hartley is in these Territories, suh, I'll get him.

"Now, suh, you mentioned certain incidents that might have some bearing on this case. What do you think of the chances?"

Kountz took up his cigar and held a match to it; leaned back and looked questioningly at Stone.

"My word," Captain Jack uttered reflectively, "I think your chance of landing your man is excellent, unless I'm badly mistaken. Ah—— I say, did you know that those very people of whom you were speaking—the two Bolands and—and their sister—were here in the Hill country?"

"The devil!" Kountz exclaimed. "No, I didn't. Well, I don't know that I should be surprised; but they moved west and settled in the Red Buttes,

Wyoming. I thought they were still there. I reckon they thought they'd try new territory."

"At any rate, they're here. And the deuce of it is—somehow I can't reconcile it," Captain Jack went on perplexedly. "Let me explain. A while back, I suppose you know, we were having a little difficulty with the natives; the ranchers hereabouts were a good bit alarmed and stuck pretty close to Walsh. During this I was scouting one day with a detail, and at one of these deserted ranches came upon a chap who answers pretty fairly to the description of this man Hartley. He's well named Piano Jim. My word! but he can play, and no mistake. There happened to be a piano at this particular place, and he was getting some marvelous harmonies out of it when I walked in on him unexpectedly. Ever hear Beethoven's 'Moonlight Sonata' well played?"

Kountz nodded comprehendingly. "It was one of Hartley's favorites," he said. "And few pianists can do it justice, I've been told."

"By Jove, that almost clinches it! Well, that's what he was playing," Captain Jack rejoined, "and he was making music, I assure you. Almost at once he got into a ruction with one of my troopers and killed him—clear case of self-defense, however. Smith—as he calls himself—came clear, of course. The beggar's surely got nerve. He stuck about the post, breaking horses for the Force till the breed uprising was broken. Then he went to work on the very ranch where I found him."

"Smith, eh?" Kountz interrupted. "Oh, well, any name would do him. I reckon, suh, you've spotted the man I want, all right, all right. Good-looking, even-featured; uses good language when he's off his guard, and the rest of the time throws in bits of range colloquialisms, eh? Another thing, suh. Since he took to the cattle country he has developed another trait—a weakness for a fancy riding rig. Silver-inlaid spurs and bit; flower-stamped saddle, silver conchos on his bridle. Of course, lots of punchers run to fancy outfits, but he goes a bit stronger than most of 'em. Does that hit him, suh?"

"To a dot," Captain Jack replied. "But, damn it, Mr. Kountz, here's what stumps me. The Boland brothers turned up at the same time; that very afternoon, to be exact—and a close shave for their sister, too, by the way, if we hadn't been scouting. Now, one would naturally think that the mere sight of him would have precipitated matters. On the contrary, barring a bit of restraint, they passed him up entirely for a month; seeing him nearly every day about the post, too. I can't understand their attitude. Later they took up a ranch across the Hills, and Smith, or Hartley, whichever one would call him, goes boldly to the place. By heavens! I saw him there this morning. And the brothers' mode of procedure seems to consist of trying to assassinate him from some safe ambush. I can't, of course, swear to either one of the Bolands being the man, but I really saw a bit of the bushwhacking process this noon.

"Another thing. I must say I was a bit taken with the man; there's something likable about him, and we met under conditions that showed him in a rather decent light. I could hardly credit the information in your letter, even while I recognized how closely it applied to him. So I kept mum about his piano playing, and made a trip to the Powell ranch to spring this matter on him offhand—fully intending to arrest him if he showed any signs of weakness. One can tell, as a general thing, whether one is dealing with a criminal. But hanged if I could make anything out of him. He simply laughed. Mind you, I had little definite proof. He knows I have strong suspicions—but he sticks to his job, when one would expect him to decamp instanter. In fact, I left him only a few hours ago heading homeward with a bunch of horses, and almost his last words were to the effect that he knew the Bolands were trying to kill him; and he coolly declared that he would fight it out with them alone. Now why should they resort to cold-blooded mur-

der when they could come out into the open and give him his just deserts so much more easily and effectually? Somehow I've got the impression that they're all a good bit afraid of Smith. On the other hand, why does this much-wanted beggar stick here and take such long chances with men he has robbed, when he *knows* that the law is nosing close on his trail?"

"I can't tell you, suh," Kountz answered thoughtfully. "It does look mighty peculiar. But the main thing is that he is here in this country. These things will be settled, suh, settled definitely, when I get my hands on him. How long will it take us to reach this ranch where he hangs out?"

"About four hours," Stone replied. "How are you fixed for horseflesh, Mr. Kountz?"

"I made it a point to be well mounted, suh," Kountz smiled.

"Then we'll start at sunrise," Captain Jack said decisively. "Meanwhile we'd better turn in. I dare say you're willing, and I really didn't get much sleep last night. My word, I lay within six feet of this slippery individual; after having taxed him with being the man, too. I imagine I'd have saved you considerable bother if I'd clapped a pair of bracelets on him, right then and there."

Stone gave up his bed to the sheriff, and stretched himself with a blanket and quilt on a couch. Presently something occurred to him. He sat up and called through the dark:

"I say, Kountz, why didn't she get a divorce?"

"Ah, that's the woman of it, suh," Kountz answered him. "She was brought up in the Catholic faith; and you know the dictum of the church."

Stone lay down again. But tired as he was he did not go to sleep. His brain buzzed too persistently with the tangle of events. He turned over and over again the sheriff's story and the things he himself had gathered, till a dull headache derailed his train of thought. And that the ache in his heart was not less acute than the one that made his temples throb, one might surmise from a sentence he whispered into his pillow:

"By God! no wonder she hated that 'Sonata'!"

Then, yielding to sheer fatigue, he fell asleep.

XI.

Powell sat on his front doorstep methodically reducing a bit of soft pine to splinters when Kountz and Captain Jack rode up to the house. He clicked his knife shut and hospitably bade them alight and come in.

"Much obliged, but we're in a bit of a hurry," said Captain Jack. "Is Smith about?"

"Smith? Well, no, he ain't," Powell told them. "He mounted his ridge-runner at sunup and pulled out. Said he was goin' over t' Boland's. Want t' see him?"

"Oh, not particularly," Stone dissembled.

"That's where he's gone, anyhow," Powell affirmed. "Told me he'd likely be back to-night. I tell yuh, this thing of havin' a good-lookin' girl around sure draws these here punchers. By gosh, they kept the trails hot t' this neck uh the woods when m' wife's sister was here. Say, yuh might as well get down and stop a while."

But Captain Jack politely declined, and they rode away. Once out of the Fish Creek bottom, Stone headed his horse due west for Graburn Basin.

"One can't be sure," he said to Kountz, "but I imagine we'll find the beggar in that neighborhood, all right. I don't know what else we can do. I must say I didn't look for him to come to close quarters with the Bolands after yesterday's clash."

"He must think himself mighty secure, suh," the sheriff replied. "I hope we locate him. And unless he started bright and early, I reckon we're not so far behind him."

For the next two hours they loped and trotted steadily up ridges and down, across wide sage-grown flats that lay between, and came at last to the crest of a low divide whence they could look down on the cabin and corrals

new-built on the Gow Flat. This time Captain Jack had been careful to bring a telescope, and Kountz was equipped with a pair of powerful binoculars. They checked their horses, and focused the two glasses on the ranch.

"No stir down there," said Captain Jack, after a minute of gazing. "The confounded place seems deserted. I don't even see any stock."

"Nor do I," Kountz observed in a pessimistic tone, lowering his glasses. "This is a big country, suh; a mighty hard country to locate a man in, if he's trying to dodge you. However, let us go down. If Tom or Walt Boland is there we'll at least establish this man's identity."

"By Jove, that's right!" Stone affirmed. "They should know. And if they clinch the thing, why, we'll collar Mr. Smith if we have to turn out the entire force."

There was a palpable air of abandonment about the place as they drew near. The squat buildings, barren of shade, bared to a blistering sun glare, were wrapped in the intense stillness of the rangeland. Not one of all the indefinite sounds that accompany the presence of man, and surround his dwelling place wherever he builds it, fell on their ears. The corral bars were down. The stable door yawned emptily as they passed. And there was no response when Stone dismounted at the cabin and rapped. He knocked again. No answer. He lifted the rude latch and went in. Kountz followed.

The room in which they stood had been stripped of even the meagre embellishments that Captain Jack remembered seeing there the day before. Then a camp bed was unrolled on the floor, a sheet-iron stove stood at one side, and a few dishes were arranged on a rough board table. Now the room was naked of everything that indicated occupation—except that the great, harp-shaped piano bulked large at the farther end. The door to the one other room was closed, and for a moment Captain Jack hesitated. Then he walked over and threw it open. Barring a few bits of paper on the floor and a torn handkerchief on the window sill, it was empty.

"Damme," Stone exclaimed, "it looks as if they'd left for good."

"It does," Kountz laconically agreed.

"Let's have a look at the stable," the captain suggested.

But an examination of the stable left them no wiser. Neither rope, strap, saddle, nor harness hung on manger or wall. And when they came outside again Captain Jack noted that the heavy canvas-covered wagon that had borne the Boland household goods into the country was gone from the ranch.

"Looks to me as if they'd simply loaded their traps into the wagon, hooked up and left," he said to Kountz. "Surely there can't possibly be any connection between this sudden flitting and Smith's coming here this morning?"

"I'm in the dark," Kountz returned. "But if they were all here yesterday afternoon, suh, they're not more than a thousand miles away yet. And they'd make tracks. A four-hoss wagon ought to be easily trailed. At any rate, let us try."

As Kountz remarked, they had to leave tracks. It was comparatively easy to pick up the trail of the wagon right from the cabin door; and it was still easier to follow the wheel marks across the flat to the west.

"They're driving four, all right," Kountz said, squinting down at the marks in the dry earth. "Their wagon is loaded light. I should say they started this morning. What do you think, suh?"

"My idea, too, from the look of the tracks," Stone agreed. "Hang it, I wonder what this sort of a move means? Ah, I say, look there."

They pulled up and studied the medley of new tracks that angled in from one side and almost obliterated the wheel marks.

"Loose hosses, suh; about sixty or seventy head," Kountz tersely commented. "Thrown in on the trail behind them."

"That's about the number they had. It seems to be a clear case of emigrate," Captain Jack observed. "Shall

we follow, on the chance that Smith is also following?"

"I don't know about that," Kountz returned. "But, as I said before, those boys will tell me if Hartley is on hand —and there's something about this whole business that makes me want to have a talk with them. We can catch this layout by sundown if we ease our hosses along. By all means let us follow them, suh."

The trail now lay plain before them, beaten in the rank growth of grass by the scores of hoofs, and easily traced by men to whom the following of range trails was no new task.

They left the Gow Flat behind, rode up a long slope, descended its farther side, and found themselves in a wide, level depression that paralleled the distant Cypress Hills. Here they halted at a spring. A drink, and two hours of grazing, freshened their horses; then they rode on.

A mile from where they rested they came unexpectedly to a washout, a long, narrow gully torn in the soft soil by spring floods. It ran from the north bank to a junction with the creek that threaded the sort of basin in which they rode. The trail of the wagon and horses turned sharply off in sight of the washout. But, calculating that it was merely a detour to find an easy crossing, Kountz and Captain Jack kept on, anxious to husband the strength of their mounts and sure that they could pick up the trail on the flat beyond.

The washout was not a dangerous place, as such places are reckoned in a country where men must ride through fearsome going if they would get anywhere. But it was twenty feet deep, each bank offering the slope of a Mansard roof, and with scant room at the bottom for a horse to gather himself for a climb up the other side. To dismount and lead their horses was hazardous, for there was a good chance of being trampled on in the scramble. Stone, however, saw a place that seemed to offer a fair crossing, and urged his horse into the brown-walled gash. He made it by a mighty effort, and turned in his saddle to watch Kountz.

He looked around just in time to see a portion of the clay bank slip from under the hind feet of the sheriff's horse. It threw the straining brute off his balance, and piled horse and rider, a struggling heap, in the bottom of the washout.

Before Captain Jack could swing from the saddle and slide down the bank, the horse gained his feet and backed away from Kountz with a snort —and the sheriff sat up painfully, bracing himself with one hand.

"Good Lord, that was a beastly fall!" Stone exclaimed. "I hope you aren't badly hurt."

"I am afraid—suh," Kountz enunciated slowly, biting his words off piecemeal, "that my leg—is broken."

"My word! I hope not," Captain Jack returned.

But Kountz was right. When Stone bent down and would have helped him to a more comfortable position Kountz gritted his teeth with the pain, and the captain needed only a brief examination of the injured limb to tell him that it was a fracture of the worst kind. He swore under his breath, and tried not to let Kountz see his perplexity. For it was truly a nasty pickle to be in. A broken leg is bad enough at any time or place, but it presents possibilities of acute suffering when a man is twenty-five miles from the nearest ranch and somewhat farther from a doctor.

"I reckon, suh—we won't go on—after all," Kountz whispered grimly.

"Hardly. But that's the least of our troubles, now." Captain Jack stood over him a few seconds, tugging viciously at his mustache. "I tell you, Mr. Kountz," he began presently, "this is bad. You'll need that leg cared for as soon as possible. It's out of the question for you to ride. So the only thing I can see to do is to go back to that ranch and knock up some sort of travois and haul you to Walsh. It's a bit nearer to Powell's, but not enough to count against the time it would take to get a doctor. At the best, we can't

get to the post before away in the night. And that bone should be set at once. Hang it, old chap, do you think you could bear to have me do it? I've had a bit of experience in that line. You'll not suffer half so much, once it's in splints."

"Go to it," Kountz muttered hardily. "Set it if you can. Do you reckon, suh—you could get me a drink?"

Captain Jack climbed back up the bank to his horse and galloped to the creek. Normally, in midsummer it was dry, but he found a shaded hole under a cutbank that still held water. He filled his hat and hurried back. Kountz gulped the water down thankfully.

"Now, suh," he said, "I'm ready."

For lack of aught better Captain Jack cut the broad fenders from his stirrup leathers. Thick and stiff from usage and little oil, they answered very well as makeshift splints. For bandages he had recourse to his flannel shirt. This, torn into strips, and the strips tied together, he placed close by, and gingerly laid hold of the broken leg.

Game as he was, Kountz mercifully relapsed into unconsciousness before the agonizing process went much farther, and Stone finished his work swiftly and silently. When he had done all that was possible, he brought another hatful of water and set it where Kountz could easily reach it. Then he mounted and headed for the Boland ranch.

There he was lucky enough to find a hatchet that in the hasty exodus had been overlooked. With that and nails wrenched from doors and a box or two he went to work. Two poles and a few pieces of board sufficed for his purpose.

Kountz was once more alive to his surroundings and resting easily when Captain Jack got back to the washout with a conveyance that defies classification, a cross between a sleigh and an Indian travois, but which, nevertheless, answered the purpose of carrying Kountz with very little jolting. He could lie on it in a fairly comfortable position, and Captain Jack's horse furnished the motive power. The most difficult task was to carry him out of the washout, but even that Captain Jack accomplished. He sat down, panting, when the top was reached; and it was Kountz whose eagle eye swept the surrounding country and called Stone's attention to an object on the back trail.

"Look there, suh," he said, pointing a lean forefinger.

And Captain Jack, looking as he directed, saw a rider on a far pinnacle stand out clear against the sky. He took the telescope from his pocket and brought it to bear on the man, but only in time to see him slip down the hill and out of sight. Nor did he appear again until they were under way for the post. Then Stone looked back into the low country they had left and saw a rider loping steadily along the trail.

XII.

When Captain Jack set the time of their probable arrival at the post as "away in the night," even he did not quite realize the toil and time that journey would require. Speed meant torture, and was out of the question. A slow walk was the only gait the broken leg of Kountz would suffer. Even then it took fortitude that few men possess to bear the jolting that rough ground involved, the crossing of coulées that must be crossed, the long, monotonous hours of plodding through the dark.

The rude trail that led through a deep, pine-swathed cañon to the flat top of the Cypress Hills ate up weary hours in its ascent. Bits of rock, fallen timber, rain-eroded hollows, all of them unseeable in the gloom of a moonless night, jolted the travois-sled and made it a time of agony to Kountz. He made no word of complaint, but Stone knew that every jarring slip brought a pang, and he moved up the hillside at a crawl. So that fast-spreading streaks of crimson-yellow fretted the gray-black sky in the east, and dawn was striding hot-footed over the ridges when Captain Jack came down the slope to Walsh.

He drew up before the hospital, and a word sent one attendant scurrying for the post surgeon, while another helped Stone bear Kountz inside. And when the sheriff was settled comfortably in a bed, with the surgeon extending critical praise of Captain Jack's bonesetting, he looked up at Stone.

"I hope you won't let that piano-playing gentleman get out of the country, suh," he said tentatively.

"Eh? Well, I rather think not," Stone responded. "Rest easy on that score, Mr. Kountz. You'll have a chance to look out this window and see him on his way to the guardhouse before you're much older. Oh, no! Our friend Smith shan't get away without explaining himself. I'm going after him this time with a *troop*. Well, good-by. Don't worry about Smith; getting the leg mended is the most important, just now. I'll look after the rest, I assure you."

The loss of one night's sleep was a matter that sat lightly upon the sturdy shoulders of Captain Jack. The twenty hours' steady going had wearied him; but the weariness was the temporary sort that in a man of his calibre a cold bath and food would readily banish. He went to his quarters, routed out the trooper who served him as "striker," and the tub and bath were shortly forthcoming. Reveille sounded while he ate. The last sweet notes of the bugle were still echoing along Battle Creek when he rose from the table and sought the major's quarters.

Standing apart from the other buildings, and yet well within the confines of the post, two rambling log structures, backed by a dozen or so cabins, represented the civilian element at Walsh. One was a general store, for the benefit of the Hill ranches, and the other was a hotel for the accommodation of such transient humans as happened into Walsh without a camp outfit.

On the rude porch of this latter, Captain Jack's roving gaze alighted just as a woman leading a little boy by the hand stepped outside the door. She was bareheaded, and the rays of the sun, that was now peeping above the horizon, falling on her hair lit it up and made it a gleaming splotch of yellow against the background of weather-beaten logs.

The distance was too great for him to clearly see her features, but he knew no woman in all the Hills, military or civilian, with hair of that peculiar sheen, save Dolly Boland; and it was not Dolly, he knew. Her carriage, as she walked slowly to the corner of the house, was different. Nor was she as tall. Yet the resemblance was enough, at the distance, to momentarily quicken his pulse, until he knew beyond peradventure that it was only a resemblance. And then he ceased his staring, and with a resentful, reckless mood creeping into the heart of him, went on to the major's.

An hour later he left Fort Walsh with Sergeant Hodge, two half-breed scouts, and twenty Mounted Policemen riding at his back; each man carrying three days' rations. Captain Jack glanced over the lot of them when they were clear of the post. Straight-backed sons of all nations they were, a hard-riding, keen-eyed, cosmopolitan lot, to whom the unfettered open, the naked sky, and the wind-whipped grassland was the only home that satisfied. And with these to aid him Captain Jack promised himself a sight of Dolly Boland, and the heavy hand of the law for the elusive Piano Jim, before he led them back to Walsh.

He rode straight north until the Cypress bench was under the hoofs of his horse. Then he split his force, to leave no loophole for Smith. Hodge, with six troopers and one scout, he ordered into the Fish Creek country.

"If he hasn't returned to Powell's, and you can't get any information there, strike west and pick up the trail from Bolands' and overtake me as soon as possible," were Captain Jack's concluding instructions. "If you get him, or any trace of him, it will only be necessary to send a man to notify me. Farther than that, you will have to use your own judgment. The important thing is to get him."

Hodge saluted, emitted his habitual "Yes, sir," and went his way.

A few hundred yards to the east of them the Fish Creek trail emerged from a cañon and slanted across the long plateau; and as Hodge left him, Captain Jack saw a buckboard slip up over the brow of the bench and whirl away to the northeast along the trail. He caught a glint of yellow under the hat of the lone occupant, and, though time was precious, he tarried to level his glass on the rig.

It was the woman he had seen at the post hotel earlier in the morning. The child was curled in the seat beside her. The bay team she drove stepped the Fish Creek trail at a swinging trot. Once the woman turned her head for an instant and regarded the knot of Mounted Policemen. Few strangers to Walsh but came from across the line, mostly from the river-town of Benton, and Captain Jack felt a momentary wonder that a woman should buck those long trails alone. But she drove steadily on, and it was none of his business who she might be or why she traveled the Fish Creek road; and so he slid the telescope into a pocket and gave his men the word to move.

From there Stone crossed the bench and plunged down the northern slope at a mile-devouring gait. Once clear of the Hills, he bore straight across country to the point where he and Kountz had left the Bolands' trail. This course took them across a patch of rough territory, two or three miles southwest of the abandoned ranch, a coulée-scarred and pinnacle-dotted expanse full of nooks and hollows where a man might ride unseeing and unseen. It was little surprise to the troopers, therefore, when they were hailed from the rear, and looked back to see a rider signaling them.

Captain Jack halted his men, the rider galloped toward them, and when the man came near enough Stone saw it was Powell himself.

"By jinks, old-timer, I'm looking for just such a layout as this," he cried to Captain Jack. "Man alive! I'm sure glad yuh showed up. I'm stumped."

"What's the matter?" Stone asked quickly. Powell's horse was wet from ears to flank; blots of lather speckled his chest, and the sweat trickled from under the edges of the saddle blanket when he was brought to a standstill. By all the signs and tokens, Powell had done some hard riding.

"Yuh didn't come by the ranch? Darn it, I know yuh didn't, or yuh wouldn't be here so early," he went on. "Well, Smith never showed up last night—recollect I told yuh he went over t' Bolands'? I didn't bother m' head none—not till early this mornin'. Then that Boland girl came ridin' in before we was up, plumb played out and half scared t' death, an' told me that Smith was shot an' layin' out in the hills. She either didn't know who done it, or she was too flabbergasted to tell me. But she seen the shootin', she said, an' she told me right where it was pulled off. Right thar on the north side uh that butte with the two big rocks on it. See it, yonder? She had the place spotted all right. An' that was about the only thing she was dead sure of. I couldn't get out uh her where the boys was, nor nothin'—only just that Smith had got his medicine, an' she couldn't find him in the dark. My other two men—blame the luck!—was over t' the H. X. So I hit for here alone t' see what I could do about it. An'——"

"Have you found him?" Captain Jack interrupted.

"No, I ain't, darn it!" Powell snapped. "All I found's a place where him—or somebody—lost a heap uh blood. But there's no carcass t' pack home, an' I don't *sabe* the thing, nohow. I ain't sharp-eyed enough t' see any track leadin' away. Maybe some uh you fellers can. Come on, I'll show yuh the place."

The breed scout cut into the conversation, addressing Stone.

"Too many rider, Ah don' theenk good capteen," he said. "Jes' you'n me'n dees man go. Too many hoss foot, damn queek spoil track. *Sabe?* Eet ees'n far, dat butte."

It wasn't far; and Stone recognized

the force of what the breed, in his capacity of trailer, felt called to tell him. So he left his men where they stood, and the three rode to the pinnacle of the two rocks.

"That thar's the place." Powell pointed to a grassy swale that skirted the base of the pinnacle. "Right thar's whar he laid 'em down for a while."

"See what you can make of it, Lavalle," Captain Jack told the scout. He himself could see in the grass the imprint of what might or might not have been a man's body, and the flattened herbage was stained darkly in one or two places—blood stain, Powell declared. But that was all, and he depended on the keen eyes and natural trailing instincts of the breed to discover just what had happened. Meantime, he sat sidewise in his saddle, rolling himself a cigarette, and moodily wishing that Smith had given the Cypress Hills a wide berth.

Lavalle leaned over a bit and looked carefully at the place. His scrutiny embraced a wide circle. Then he straightened up and rode out of the swale to the north, still staring down. Only for a few rods, however, did he keep in that direction, turning presently and coming back to the starting point. This time he rode out of the hollow to the south, climbed the side of the pinnacle a few yards, still studying intently the ground immediately before him. He pulled up suddenly, and sat still for a moment, glancing around. Then he leaned far over in his right stirrup and picked up something. Whirling about, he trotted straight to Powell and Captain Jack, carrying in his hand a worn horseshoe.

"Dees man, he's ride de shod hoss, maybeso?" he inquired tentatively.

"That's what he did," Powell declared. "By jinks, I shod that hoss m'self, six weeks ago. He's a big black, an' a drifter. I give him to Smith, so's he'd have one gentle hoss in his string."

"Hees geet shoot up some, all right, dees feller," Lavalle continued in a matter-of-fact tone. "Ah teenk som' tam' to-morrow een de morneeng."

"Yesterday, you mean," Captain Jack corrected.

"Sure teeng. Yes'rday—dat's heem. Ah'm all tam' geet meex on dem word," Lavalle spluttered. "Anyway, hees stan' on dees butte, an' som' feller ees ta' shot at heem. Ah teenk hees mak' pretty good shot, too. De hoss hees geeve beeg jump down heel, an' tear off de shoe. *Sabe?* Hees fall off de hoss, an' lay in de grass an' bleed lak' hell. Den hees pull de gon an' shoot two-tree tam' heemself—de shell hees lay where eet drop. Bimeby hees crawl down een dees hole an' Ah teenk hees pretty seek man. Hees bleed som' more, an' lay dere long tam' —teel way pas' noon, som' tam'. Den hees geet back on de hoss an' ride off. Hees trail she's go dere." Lavalle pointed to the northwest. "Yo' wan' for foller heem, eh?"

"He's the man we're after," Stone returned. "Follow his track, Lavalle. I dare say he won't be far if he was badly hit."

Powell made no comment just then, and Captain Jack did not trouble to explain why they were after Smith. The two of them followed Lavalle in silence, and when the breed led out at a trot Stone waved his men to come on. In a few minutes the red-jacketed squad fell in behind, and the pursuit of Smith was on in earnest.

For some time Lavalle held to the northerly direction, then he veered slightly to the west, and before long Stone found himself overlooking a bit of country he had lately traversed—the valley-like formation into which he had traced the Boland wagon tracks. He could see the dark line that was the washout where Kountz had broken his leg. It flashed into his mind that he must be on the very height of land where he had glimpsed the horseman the afternoon before, and that the horseman must have been Smith.

That Lavalle was nosing out Smith's trail with unerring instinct he had no room to doubt; for only a little way back the breed had motioned toward the ground in a hollow where the grass was sparse and the soil a sandy loam;

and on this impressionable surface lay the perfect imprint of three shod hoofs and one that had left a flat, natural track.

The idea that Smith had been riding toward them shortly became a conviction, for after a period of jogging through a stretch of coulées and water-worn gulches the breed led them straight to the Boland trail and followed it without deviation past the washout where Kountz had played his last card in the game.

"Say, captain," Powell broke the long silence, "Smith can't be shot up so infernal bad, after all, or he wouldn't be able to get out and cover ground like this. An' did I understand yuh t' say yuh was *after* him?"

Captain Jack nodded. "He's wanted across the line," he explained briefly.

"Hell, that's too bad! I kinda like that jasper," Powell said regretfully. "Well, there's been many a good man had to go on the dodge over there. Smith always looked to me like he was a white man, an' strictly on the square. Hope it don't amount t' much. But seein' you all are goin' t' foller him up, I reckon that lets me out. I can't stay with you fellers; I'd be afoot mighty soon. I hit the high places this mornin', and m' hoss is about done. So I reckon I'll turn back."

"You might just as well," Captain Jack agreed. "I have no choice but to follow this chap till I get him; and of course if he's wounded we'll take decent care of him."

"All right. That's all anybody could do. But say, captain, I want t' ask yuh somethin'. I don't care a cuss what Smith's done, or what's he's supposed t' have done; you tell him that old Bill Powell's his friend. An' if he wants t' see me, if he thinks I can help him out any, will yuh let me know?"

"Certainly," Captain Jack replied. "I'll make it a point to let you know if he wishes it."

"All right, then. So-long." And Powell swung his tired horse about with his nose for home.

Stone watched him over his shoulder a minute, half wishing that he, too, could have that blind faith in the man whose trail they were following doggedly. For Captain Jack was very human; his five years in the Force had not made of him a cold-blooded instrument of the law. In spite of the fact that when Dolly Boland was uppermost in his thoughts he hated Smith with a passion primitive in its force, there were times when the personality of Smith as he had known him asserted the mastery; and Captain Jack found himself analyzing, going over the tangle of events bit by bit, wondering if Smith was the thoroughgoing scoundrel his record proclaimed.

The trail left the lowland, and its course took them over the crest of the next divide. Far in the rear Stone got a glimpse of Powell, a speck in the distance. Then the hill shut him off, and the captain looked for him no more. Already the strain of hard riding was beginning to weary him. The coolness of morning was gone. The wind that now and then brushed by in lazy currents was superheated. The earth sweltered. In the clear air the Hills stood out like a huge purple beast crouching quiescent on the face of the earth.

With this to the south of him, and great dun-colored plains to the east and west and north, on the vast breadth of which the ridges and creek valleys were too minute to break the general level that swept to a far horizon, he rode behind the half-breed scout till it was noon and time to halt. Then for a brief space the jingle of bits and spurs and the creaking of dry saddle leather was hushed. The troopers ate, lay down in the grass, and smoked silently. The age-old stillness of the prairies resumed its sway for a little while.

XIII.

When their horses had rested and fed, they saddled and rode on. A little farther, on the bank of a tiny creek, they came to a place where the grass had been cropped in a small circle, and the policemen needed no eagle-eyed La-

valle to tell them that here Smith had camped for the night. Thereafter ensued a period of monotonous following where the half-breed led. Over ridges, flats, creeks, rough country and smooth, Lavalle pounded at a hard trot, bearing always west and a few degrees south.

The sun dipped lower, till its rays crept under their hat brims. Already they had reached the western tip of the Cypress, and the Mountain—as the abrupt terminus of the Hills is known—towered on their left hand. And at this point, keeping well out from the Hills, the wide trail of the Bolands turned sharply south, toward the Montana line, and with it the undeviating print of three hoofs that were rimmed with steel and one that was bare.

Within an hour of sundown they came upon the night camp of the Bolands. Quick to read the mute language of the trail, they noted the foot-worn space where the wagon had stood, the bits of charred stick, and all about the trampled grass where the horse herd had circled, feeding under guard.

"Hees mak' damn good tam', dem feller," Lavalle grunted. Stone had told him upon whose trail Smith hung so closely. "Look lak' hees all heet for 'cross de line, capteen."

"Does look that way," Stone agreed. "We're about twelve or fourteen hours behind 'em. There's nothing against these people, though. We're after Smith. How far d'ye think he's in the lead now?"

Lavalle considered a moment. "Ah don' theenk we catch heem dees day," he said thoughtfully. "Hees mak' good tam' heemself. Hees track look lak' seex, seven hour een fron'—can' tell jus' for sure. But Ah see hees bleed som' more, back leetle piece, an' stop w'ile for let de hoss eat. Maybeso hees geet seek—no more ride fas'. Eef hees stop som' more we geet heem, eef we ride lak' hell; eef hees no stop, we geet heem nex' day."

"Hit it up, then, as long as you can see his trail,," Captain Jack ordered. "Make lope. *Sabe?*"

Lavalle *sabed,* judging by the pace he set. But evidently Smith's hurt was not of a character to stop him for any length of time. The sun disappeared below the skyline in a blaze of crimson and gold. Dusk crept over the land. The Hills—now on their flank—faded and were lost in the shadow of night. Then Lavalle pulled up, and Captain Jack halted his men.

Dark enveloped them completely with the picketing of the horses. Indistinct forms passed and repassed each other in the gloom. Men tripped over riding gear and muttered profanely. They gathered a few willows from the creekside, and presently fires punctured the dark—small flames that threw a softening glow on the faces of the policemen grouped about them, and left an encompassing circle of black an arm's length beyond.

A pot of tea washed down their rations; the fires dwindled for lack of fuel, and pipes glowed in the regathering shadow; then they stamped out the few remaining embers and took to their blankets.

Again the dark enfolded. And out beyond the sleepers, prone by their guns and saddles, the horses grazed on picket, cropping the grass with faint crunchings. Occasionally one coughed, or another shook himself. Near midnight they ceased feeding, and, like their masters, slept. Then the stillness became absolute.

But it did not hold sway for long. A breeze that rustled the dry grass stalks came softly out of the east, gathered volume, whined over the silent camp ground, and grew to a gale. And from then till the first glimmer of day the boisterous wind-devils whooped maliciously about the ears of Captain Jack and his men, tugging at the slack of their blankets and sifting fine dust into the folds.

Dawn came at last. Not with a blazen of color, but in sober gray did it come; for a cloudbank hung in the east, blown up on the forefront of the wind that died as the day was born.

With the first lightening of the sky came also the lighting of the fires, the saddling of horses. Then they were

up and away—Lavalle riding swiftly in the lead, with eyes bent to the trail.

It was their last day of grace. Forty-odd miles to the south the forty-ninth parallel of latitude marked a boundary beyond which the queen's riders ventured only by sufferance of complaisant United States marshals. This Captain Jack well knew, and the mounts of his troopers felt the spur of haste in that last dash to overhaul the fugitive before he crossed the line.

The loud chant of the night wind was followed by a quiet, balmy morning, once the sun shot above the sullen bank of cloud. It grew warm, then hot. With the heat the wind renewed its vigor and whipped a black thunder cloud down over the head of the Mountain. It hovered there only a brief span of time, then stole down the slope and went boiling down the Manyberries, a lowering, murky mass that spat lightning and emitted growlings of thunder. With the swiftness of summer storms it fled down the course of this stream. From far to the left of the policemen it passed far ahead. Now and then Lavalle would let his gaze wander for a moment from the trail to the scudding storm that hugged the lowland and followed so closely the steep-banked creek.

Riding thus, they swept up the height of land that lies between Piegan Valley and Manyberries Creek, whence they could overlook a vast territory and see in the distance the silver-blue sheen of Pak-o-gee Lake, where the Manyberries emptied its waters.

"*Sacre!* Ba gosh, she's bus'. Look a-dees, capteen!" Lavalle jerked his horse up in one jump, and waved a hand toward the thunderstorm. "Ba gosh, Ah'm glad, me, Ah'm not een dat cañon. Wah!"

A curious thing was happening. The lowering, black drift had lifted, and seemed to be rising from the ground, and from one end of it a wide, grayish chute connected it with the earth. Though it was ten miles away, a faint roaring, like the beat of ocean surf, arose. The body of the cloud seemed to shrink perceptibly. The wide shaft, a pouring cataract without the background of a mountainside, glistened in the sun. Then all at once the phenomenon passed. The cloud shrank and disintegrated as if a giant hand had wrung the substance from it and cast the residue aside. There was nothing of the storm that had bulked black against the horizon twenty minutes before—only a few ragged wisps of cloud floating serenely away. But the troopers knew; they had seen the like before.

"My word, but that was a jolly big one," Captain Jack commented. "Lucky thing we're not under it. I say, Lavalle, how far do you make it to that cloudburst. Think it will spoil the trail?"

"'Bout ten, twelve mile, Ah teenk," the breed replied. "Hees sure feex dem track, eef hees go dat way. But Ah fin' heem som' more."

Stone held his men a minute longer while he scanned the country beyond, hoping that the telescope might reveal the black speck that would be Smith. But he saw only illimitable grassland, a few bunches of antelope, and farther south the misty outline of the Sweetgrass Hills; and so he put up his glass and motioned Lavalle to lead the way.

Down the slope, straight to Manyberries as a crow could wing, the trail of Smith ran. And on the edge of the creek it ceased, wiped out by the battering rain and the flood that had ravened over the bottoms.

Like many streams that rise in the Cypress, the Manyberries flowed through a tiny valley that narrowed in places to a box cañon, straight-walled, deep. A scrubby growth of brush, service berries and wild cherries that gave the stream its name, lined the channel of the creek proper. Now the brush was a matted tangle of mud and driftwood, and the creek that should have been a two-foot crystal-clear brook was a torrent of brown water, narrow, but swimming deep. They splashed through puddles to the edge of the clayey swirl. Below them the valley contracted to a gorge. Lavalle pinched his eyebrows together, and spoke as if thinking aloud:

"Ah can' tell notteeng for sure, now. Damn! Dere ees ol' buff'lo hont trail goo troo dees cañon, an' mak' for de O U—dem Stevens hees been use for haul de supply on de ranch from de pos'. Maybeso dees feller hees tak' dat. Maybeso hees go straight 'cross. Ah teenk dees ees for sure swim, me, an' hont over 'cross."

"They might have followed the ranch trail," said Captain Jack, "and then again, I hardly see why. They certainly crossed somewhere. It's devilish luck to lose the man's track now; but I imagine we can pick it up over yonder. Slacken your cinches a bit, men. Take the water single file—not too close."

Stone led the way. To men who upon occasion swam broad rivers the Manyberries offered slight obstacle. Save getting soaked in dirty water they gained the south side without mishap, and went *plop-plop*-ing across the sodden flat and up the farther bank. There the fall of rain had been more extended, and not till they rode more than a mile from the creek did Lavalle find ground where a track three hours' old would show—and then the problem was to find the track.

Here Stone split his force again, sending six men in the direction of Pend d'Oreille, with orders to scatter out and sweep to the line on high ground. With the rest he followed Lavalle in his search for the peculiar hoof-marks of the horse Smith rode.

Lavalle's method was simplicity itself, and the natural one for a man who read trails as most men read the pages of a book. He turned and rode parallel with the course of the creek.

"Eef hees cross an' strike sout', Ah geet heem dees way," he declared.

But he did not "geet heem dees way." For an hour he pounded into the southwest, keeping even with the Manyberries, without finding that which he sought. Then Stone called a halt.

"See here, Lavalle," he suggested, "I hardly think they'd go this way; not Smith at least. He wouldn't strike the line short of the Rockies at this angle. Sure you haven't crossed the track?"

"Ah don' cross tracks, me," the breed sullenly retorted. "Dees man w'at ride de hoss w'at loss de shoe—hees not cross dees country—onless hees fly," he concluded ironically.

"My word, he seems to have flown," Stone reflected. "All right, Lavalle, keep on," he said to the half-angry breed. "We must pick up that trail pretty soon, or he'll be gone for good as far as we're concerned."

Lavalle, however, was staring intently at a point far in the rear, and instead of moving on, he turned to Captain Jack with a puzzled air.

"Yo' see dem speck?" he asked, pointing back. "Dem's hoss. W'at hees do dere? Ah don' see heem before. Tak' look weet de glass, capteen. Maybeso dees man an' dem feller all tam' een de creek, eh? *Sacré!* Dey can' be ver' far."

Once more Captain Jack squinted eagerly through the telescope. Though he could not read the brands, his memory of the Boland saddle stock served to identify one or two conspicuously marked horses. He lowered his glass, and a multitude of queries uprose in his mind—queries that had been more or less insistent, and wholly unanswerable, since Powell had set them on Smith's trail. Why did Smith stick so tenaciously in the footsteps of the two Bolands? What demon of unrest was driving those two men out of the country in such haste that they must leave their sister behind—alone? And finally, if they were in the neighborhood of their stock, would Smith be close at hand?

"Oh, damnation take the lot of them!" Captain Jack exploded. "He can't be far. Hanged if I can help thinking the beggar's been following just for another whack at 'em. Here goes." And Captain Jack turned his men and galloped straight for the grazing horses.

Once among them, his recognition was verified; the horses feeding quietly along bore the D with a bar below that proclaimed the Boland ownership. This fact established, he tore on toward the Manyberries, following the glaring

trail the many hoofs had cut in the rain-washed land.

On the brink of the valley Stone checked his horse, and a murmur rose from the lips of his men. The gorge, above which they had crossed nearly two hours earlier, opened out like a fan a hundred yards up the creek. The channel forked at its mouth, flowed a little way and reunited, forming a miniature island, a tiny bit of bottom-land a few feet higher than the rest.

Halfway along this island a wagon lay on its side, partly submerged in the still boiling stream. The four-horse team was fast in the stout harness, a tangled heap around which the brown water swirled and bubbled. On the higher ground a rod back from the drowned team a rangy black horse stood listlessly, dozing on three legs in the sunshine; and on the soaked earth close by him a man lay full length, with his head resting on one doubled-up arm.

"By heavens! that cloudburst caught them in the gorge!" Stone cried.

"Yo' see dees black hoss, capteen?" Lavalle triumphantly pointed. "Ah know dat saddle, me. Ah tell yo' Ah don' cross hees track."

But Stone was already riding down the slippery bank, and he paid no heed to Lavalle's justification of himself. The breed and troopers followed. They pushed into the fast-receding flood, crossed it, and stood waiting for orders, staring curiously at the over-turned wagon, watching Stone for their cue to act.

Captain Jack swung out of his saddle and bent over the man. He knew it was Smith; the tousled brown hair, the dress, were his. Stone touched him on the shoulder. There was no answering move. He laid hold then, and turned him gently over. His clothes were soaked, plastered with mud. A silk handkerchief, stiff with blood, was wrapped tightly about his neck, covering a wound that was swollen and red.

Stone marveled that the man could live, much less ride as he had done. But he was alive, and the handling roused him out of his torpor. He opened his eyes and looked blankly up at Stone. There was no hint of recognition in his gaze.

Captain Jack beckoned a policeman. When they helped him to a sitting posture he insisted on struggling to his feet and standing alone—wavering like a man drunk. His face was flushed; the pupils of his dark eyes big with fever.

"Sit down, Smith," Captain Jack urged. "Let me look at that hurt. My word, you're in bad shape."

"By God, it was a long road, a long road," Smith muttered unheedingly. Then suddenly, with a cackling laugh: "By the nine eternal gods of war, you're a great-looking bunch." He lurched to one of the troopers and poked him tentatively with outstretched finger. "I just want to see," he murmured, "whether you're painted or peeled. Red, by thunder—red! Wouldn't that kill you!" He grinned at the trooper, then the pain in his neck asserted itself, and he put his unsteady hands up to the silk wrapping.

Stone spoke to him again, trying to jar him into a sense of the realities.

"Smith, I say, Smith, what became of the Boland boys? Did they drown?"

"That's all right, old hand." Smith swayed, plucking at his neck, and would have fallen if Stone had not caught him. "It's a mighty long way home. And it's hotter than seven hells, isn't it? Let's go swimming."

"Clear out of his head," Captain Jack decided. "I really don't wonder. I say, Beck, help me with him. Hollis, you and Pryor round up the stock out on the hill and bring them down here. The rest of you get those dead horses loose from the wagon. Take your ropes and straighten up the wagon and pull it out, once you get the team loose. Don't cut the harness. We shall need it to haul this chap in. And look out for bodies. Those men must have drowned, or they'd be on the spot."

They straightened out the tangle, set the four horses adrift, and with ropes to their saddle horns tugged and strained till the heavy wagon rose slowly from the stream. Once on its wheels,

they snaked it to dry land, and stripped off the canvas cover that had remained fast and kept the contents of the wagon box from floating away. Hollis and Pryor brought in the horses, corralled them against a bank, and roped four that bore marks of harness.

And while they labored, Smith babbled foolishly on. When they saw that nothing else would avail, Stone and the trooper laid hold of him to examine and dress his wound. He struggled for a moment, and went limp as a rag; and thereafter he lay unheeding while they washed and bandaged the ugly hole at the base of his neck. Still unconscious, they laid him in the wagon, making him as comfortable as they could. Then a fire was built and food cooked, and they ate while their horses grazed. A little past noon they drew out of the Manyberries, riding silently toward Fort Walsh, and for many a mile Smith lay in the wagon like a dead man, with his face to the canvas that shielded him from the sun.

XIV.

They were crossing Willow Creek when Smith came to himself again. The trooper on the seat turned at the sound of his voice.

"Eh? Sure thing. Captain, he's come alive again. He wants a drink. Whoa there, yuh high-headed varmints."

Stopping his team, the driver felt under the seat, and handed out a tin pail to one of the riders. He filled it from the creek, and while Smith drank thirstily Captain Jack rode back and looked in the end of the wagon.

"How do you feel now?" he asked.

"Rotten." Smith's answer was brief, but expressive. "Where did you pick me up? Was I standing guard over this layout?"

"Yes." Captain Jack hesitated a little over his next words, but the rules of the Force left him no choice. "I must warn you that anything you say may be used against you," he said perfunctorily. "You are under arrest."

"Oh, hell!" Smith propped himself to a sitting posture, and glared at Stone. The flash of anger was instantly succeeded by a smile, an amused, mocking expression. "So you figure you'll collect that two thousand, after all?" he asked dryly.

"We won't discuss that," Stone retorted sharply. "I merely wish to ask you a question that has no bearing on the case. Were the Bolands drowned in that cloudburst?"

"Refuse to answer," Smith drawled tantalizingly, "on the ground that it might incriminate me. That's the usual formula, isn't it?"

"Drive on, Hollis," Captain Jack snapped at the policeman who held the reins. But Smith hailed him weakly, and he returned again to glower at the man who could smile and be maddening facetious under such conditions.

"I want a cigarette," Smith pleaded. "My tobacco's wet; and anyway, you're the only man in this country that has decent stuff to smoke. Don't get on your high horse and ride over me when I'm down. I'll be good. You shouldn't get hostile because I don't take things as seriously as I might. And I want a smoke, bad."

Captain Jack passed over tobacco and papers in disdainful silence, and the wagon moved on. At sundown they camped, still thirty-five miles from the post.

Smith sat up in the wagon and ate a good meal. "First grub I've seen for two days," he told Hollis, when the trooper took away the cup and plate. "No wonder I was loony when you found me." After that one remark he kept strict silence, lying back on his makeshift bed, smoking Stone's tobacco like a man with a new lease of life.

Hollis came again presently and washed his neck and bandaged it afresh; the swelling had lessened, and it did not pain so much. The twilight deepened. A policeman took the horse herd a little way from camp and began his all-night vigil. Soon no one stirred about the camp, save the sentry who paced up and down beside the wagon. Listening to the soft, grass-muffled tread of him, Smith fell asleep. When

he awakened again it was day, and Hollis was gently tapping him on the foot, and holding out a cup of coffee. A half hour later they were under way.

A little before noon they topped the last ridge and rolled down into Walsh on the MacLeod trail. Mindful of his prisoner's wound, and likewise of the Omaha sheriff waiting impatiently for news of his success or failure, he ordered the wagon straight to the hospital door. There he directed two policemen to help Smith down and inside. But Smith had slept and rested, and was no longer the delirious, helpless man they had picked up on the Manyberries. He waved aside the troopers and stood sturdily on his own legs. Stone motioned him to enter. In the hall Smith turned to him.

"What about this?" he asked. "What made you so keen to arrest me, all at once?"

"There's a man in the next room who can answer that," Stone coldly replied.

"Trot him out, then," Smith returned. "I want to see what he looks like."

"You'll see him fast enough after the doctor's had a look at you," Captain Jack assured him pointedly.

One of the hospital orderlies came in as Stone was speaking.

"The doctor's out, sir," he said in answer to the captain's query. "He was called to the Ten Mile ranch to sew up a fellow's head, sir. He'll be back about three, he said."

"Ah—by the way, is that man I brought in day before yesterday awake? How is he?"

"He's awake, yes sir. Getting on nicely, sir."

"Very well, I shall have to see him for a moment. This way, Smith." And Stone opened a door and stepped into the room where Kountz lay.

He raised his head at sight of Captain Jack, and the gray eyes lit up expectantly. "What luck, suh?"

Captain Jack moved forward, and nodded toward Smith.

"Is this your man?" he asked evenly.

Kountz stared blankly at Smith for a second, then he struck the bedclothes with his clinched hand.

"By the Lord, no!" he cried. "Why, it's Jim Lane."

Smith walked past the captain to the bedside, and his brown hand closed over the outstretched one of Kountz.

"How we do mill around in this little old world," he chuckled. "I certainly didn't look for old Andy Kountz here—and yet I might have known you wouldn't be far behind."

"I'm powerful glad to see you, Jim, powerful glad; even if you do look a little the worse for wear." The sheriff's tone took a whimsical turn as he addressed Captain Jack. "'Most as glad, suh, as I would be to have Paul Hartley walk in. I can see how you got fooled, suh. I didn't think of Jim Lane. I reckon we've been playing in the wrong yard."

"By Jove! I can't say that I really understand it, at all," Captain Jack declared. "Of course you know the man you want. It's merely another black eye for purely circumstantial evidence. And all things considered, I find myself a good bit at sea."

"I reckon there is considerable light to be shed on this subject," Lane put in. "Anyway, don't hold it against me, Captain Jack. I hated like the devil to be mistaken for Paul Hartley; but I couldn't make explanations to you, or anybody else, for reasons that I'll presently make clear."

"Perhaps I was a bit quick at jumping to conclusions," Captain Jack stiffly admitted. "However, I'm rather glad you're able to prove my conclusions wrong. I think you understand how I felt about it——"

"I do," Lane interrupted. "And I——"

"So if you'll pardon me," Stone went doggedly on, "I'll leave you chaps to yourselves, just now. Better have the attendant look at your neck, Smith—er, I mean Lane. I'll look in after a bit."

With that Captain Jack stalked out and away to his quarters, very straight and stiff and frowning. He was conscious of a keen resentment against

Smith—as he continued to think of him—for permitting him to labor under a mistaken idea so long. Yet he felt an odd sort of relief that Smith was not the infernal scoundrel the evidence had seemed to prove.

"Damme," he thought, "the beggar knew I had a bit of liking for him. He might have trusted me, whatever mysterious object he was warring with his own people about."

At the same time, Captain Jack was human enough to be piqued at failure—when he had been apparently on the point of bringing to justice a man he hated and despised, though he had never known or seen him. Always in the background of his thoughts, since he had listened to the story told by Kountz, Dolly Boland's passionate cry, "Do you see that? Do you know what it means?" was stirring him. There were times when he felt that he could tear limb from limb with his bare hands the man whose shadow lay between them. For he knew she cared, even as he did. But she was bound by a faith, a theological dogma, that Captain Jack, understanding, knew he could neither evade nor dispel—save in one way.

He went into his cabin, and dropped moodily into a chair. A pipe and a tin box of plug-cut lay on the table beside him. Mechanically he filled the pipe and smoked, puffing nebulous wreaths and absently watching them curl into fantastic shapes above his head. And out of the smoke a few things recurred to Captain Jack with insistent force. There was a good deal that puzzled him. It seemed to have been a game of cross-purposes, but even at that he could not understand Dolly Boland's evident fear and distrust of Lane, nor why Tom and Walt Boland had tried so hard to kill him. He could put himself in Lane's place and picture the spirit of dogged retaliation that kept him on their trail after he was shot. But why the shooting? And why their flight? Captain Jack blew smoke rings till the room was a blue haze, and pondered. And his pondering took him in a barren circle, back to the starting point—the Why.

"Hang it! it's a jolly queer state of affairs," he reflected. "I can't see either rhyme or reason in it. But it's really none of my business; and no amount of explanation would make things any different. I shall simply have to take my medicine. I wouldn't mind so much—only—only——"

The ashes in his pipe went cold while he sat there, resting an elbow on the table and his chin in the palm of one hand. And there was little comfort in his thinking.

"Damn it! *damn* it!" he burst out savagely, and springing to his feet paced up and down the room. "I'll quit the Force. Thank the Lord for that windfall from Uncle Mort—I won't have to grin and stick it out for lack of a few dollars. There's Africa and South America. And I made such jolly fine plans when I got that letter. Oh, I'll be a sniveling idiot if I keep on thinking about it."

He continued his monotonous pacing, four steps and a turn, four steps and a turn, for close on a half hour. Then he sat down in his chair, and resting his chin in his hand, as before, stared fixedly at the wall, seeing through it and beyond into the future. After a time a knock sounded at his door, and he sprang to his feet impatiently. It was an orderly from the hospital.

"Mr. Kountz wants to see you, sir," the man told him.

He put on his hat and followed the orderly. Within a few yards of the hospital door it opened, and two women and a little boy came out. Captain Jack's heart leaped at sight of them—for one was Dolly Boland. The other was the woman he had last seen crossing the Cypress bench, driving north on the Fish Creek trail; and seeing her now at close range it dawned upon him that she must be Jim Lane's wife. Not so tall, a bit older, she was of the same blonde type as her sister; a beautiful woman.

He caught only a flash of her face before it was averted, and that momentary glimpse showed him that she had been crying. But he ceased abruptly to

think of her, for as he placed his foot on the threshold Dolly looked back over her shoulder and smiled at him, and the look of her set his blood dancing. He stood on the step, and watched the two till they crossed the grounds and entered the hotel. Then, still wondering at the message of that fleeting glance, he went slowly in. Kountz was propped up with pillows at his back, and Lane sat beside the bed in a comfortable chair. Except for the flush on his cheeks and his bandaged neck, Lane seemed little the worse for his wound.

"You wished to see me, Mr. Kountz?" Stone asked.

"Yes, suh." The gray eyes twinkled in their deep recesses. "I want to see you—and Jim he wants to talk to you."

"I've just talked Kountz into compounding a felony for the sake of the family," Lane put in lightly. "And he wants to know what you think about it. See here, captain, there are several phases of this affair that you've done a lot of wondering about, eh?"

"That's a fact," Captain Jack frankly admitted. "And I'm still wondering."

"I don't blame you," Lane smiled. "I was on the point of telling you once or twice. But I hadn't much to go on; and I didn't want to make any wild assertions. Kountz has told you about the Omaha end of it, but there's a lot that he didn't know. I only *suspected* till the last day or so. You remember how I came into this country?"

Stone nodded.

"Well, I was simply following a trail that I've been camping on pretty much all the time since the Merchant's National went up. It sounds like the devil, I know, but I was sure Tom and Walt Boland had a hand in that. Of course, Hartley was the active agent, but—well, I knew those boys better than anybody. I knew the gait they were traveling. And I found out right at the start that Hartley had been keeping them in funds for some time before the big steal. They considered themselves cheated, the way the estate was left. And, I'm sorry to say, that they have been, and are, about as unprincipled a pair of youngsters as I ever knew."

"*Are?*" Captain Jack interrupted. "You use the present tense. Then they weren't drowned in that cloudburst?"

"Oh, no," Lane answered. "But I'll come to that directly. As I said, I figured that they and Hartley had made common cause—they may have put him up to it, for all I know. I don't think that out-and-out robbery was the original plan. But he had used bank funds, and about the time he was married he had come to a point where he had to replace them, or face the music. I imagine his marriage to Dolly was a cold-blooded affair, calculated to solve the problem.

"However, he drank too much wine at the wedding dinner, and it must have gone to his head. They'd barely got home when he demanded that she check over to him what cash she had on deposit at the Merchant's—something like forty thousand dollars. Doll's not a fool, and that was a horrible jolt to her—still, it was the best thing that could have happened. Of course she refused to agree to any such crazy proposition, and he was fool enough to try and make her; even went the length of choking her. Kountz told you how she left him and came to us within four hours of her marriage. Well, that was the why. Hartley realized what he'd done, after she'd slipped away from him, and when she told me to shut the door in his face that evening there was only one loophole for him. That night he made a clean sweep.

"Now, I happen to know—which the Omaha authorities never found out—that from my place he went straight to these estimable brothers-in-law of mine. That's what started me; that, in conjunction with the fact that the Omaha detectives tried their hardest to connect me with the looting. So I began to trace Hartley, and kept track of Walt and Tom at the same time. You can understand that I had to keep all this strictly to myself, for my wife's sake, if for no other reason; you know how

blood kinship is. These two gentlemen, on the other hand, very adroitly led Dolly to believe that I might have had a hand in it. That was the foundation of her distrust of me.

"You know from Kountz how he kept Hartley jumping around the country. The Pinkertons kept watch in the big towns and the seaports. I was never very far behind him myself. And in the course of time I formulated a theory—on the strength of Tom and Walt quietly slipping farther away from Omaha every year, and also having more money than the little bunch of horses justified—that they were keeping in touch with Hartley. The last trace of Hartley I had was in southern Idaho, and I lost him there. So I took to watching them.

"Last spring they quit the Black Hill country very quietly, ostensibly headed for the Big Horn Mountains. Instead, they came down Powder River, crossed the Yellowstone, and pulled straight for the north. I left my wife and boy in Miles City, and followed. When they crossed the line I saw that they were heading for here, and it struck me that there was method in their moving. The Northwest is supposed to be a good place for a hunted man to bury himself. What then, I reasoned, is to prevent Hartley from stealing into the Territories where sheriffs and Pinkertons will be very apt to overlook him?

"So, with this in mind, I trailed them up. But I lost them on Milk River in a storm, and blundered into the hills, here, alone. You recollect how we met. They knew that I had a hazy notion of the game they were playing, and they opened up hostilities the very first day. The afternoon I left you and picked up Doll's horses, I bumped into them, and we declared war—I was hot, and I didn't pick soft words. That scored hand I got was the result of Walt taking a crack at me. Remember it?

"They didn't dare try getting away with me while we were at the post. And when they located in the Graburn Basin I went to work for Powell, to be within striking distance of them. What I wanted, then, was a chance to go through their stuff, and catch them with the goods. I'd have had them then. But they had it cached, I reckon; anyway, I didn't find it. And my coming there set Doll wild. She didn't understand, you see. They didn't like to cut loose on me before her, and I didn't accuse them in her presence. So we had a sort of armed truce. But they made up for that by bushwhacking me on the range. One of them seemed to be on the lookout for me pretty much all the time. That was Tom's horse you killed that day—and you scratched him, too. I'd have told you then, only this description business had come up, and I didn't think you'd believe me.

"That last set-to scared them, though, and they decided that the game wasn't worth playing clear through. If they'd known the joker I had up my sleeve, they'd never have gone so far. But they loaded up and pulled south next morning. That set Doll to thinking there was something wrong; and she began putting two and two together. I went back again that same morning. I was getting desperate. And one of them was on the lookout, and made a sneak on me. He came near fixing me, too. Doll saw the fracas from a distance, it seems, and recognized me. She couldn't bear to think of a man being left dead, or dying, in the hills, so she stole away when they camped that evening—but Powell told you about that, didn't he?

"I wasn't nearly so dead, however, as they thought. And the abandonment of the ranch convinced me that they *did* have part of the plunder, and I followed them up, aiming to kill them both if that was the only way I could bring them to time. It was certainly hell to ride, the shape I was in, but I plugged along, about half crazy, and finally came up on them while they were in that cañon. I rode along the top, and, when they were a little way from the mouth of the gorge, I stopped them—perhaps you noticed that one of the wheel horses was shot. It was a fine place for a hold-up; and, for once, I had them where they couldn't do a thing.

"Then all at once that cloudburst hit

the creek above, and, while I was getting ready for the next act, a wall of water sloshed through that rift in the landscape, picked them up, horses, wagon, and all, tossed them this way and that like a bunch of willows, and finally hung the entire outfit up on that island where you found the remains. Tom was driving, and he came out of it like a drowned rat. Walt I kept under my gun. The horse herd was out of the gorge when the flood struck, and they took to the hillside. But I still had the two gentlemen hypnotized with my Winchester, and was master of the situation—though my head was buzzing like a swarm of bees, and sometimes I was seeing double. And, just as I was starting down the bank, I noticed a little bunch of redcoats on the divide to the north.

"That helped me see it through. I made Walt come up, and I pointed the policemen out to him. Then I drove him back to his brother, and gave the pair their choice of taking a horse apiece and quitting the country, or going back to Omaha to face trial for complicity in bank looting.

"They were cowed by the flood, and, I think, a little bit afraid of me, and so they were glad to hit the trail. I took away their guns. Before I let them go, I made them show me where they had the securities I was looking for. And they had them, all right, stowed away in a trunk in the wagon. They're wet, but they're there. Then they tore away down the creek, dead anxious to be gone before any policemen came. I was pretty wobbly by that time, and, when they were gone, the reaction set in; and you know how you found me better than I do."

Lane paused, and looked at Captain Jack in a reflective sort of way.

"That makes it somewhat clearer, eh?" he asked. "Your catching me playing Powell's piano that day, was what fooled you worst. That was a clinching bit of evidence. And the apparent bad feeling between those boys and myself strengthened your impression, of course. But when it got to the point where I could have told you, I was afraid to—you and Doll would have spoiled it. I wanted to get my hands on the securities I felt sure those two had. I had the key to the situation all the time, but I didn't dare use it."

Captain Jack sat silent for a moment. Then he looked straight at Lane. "I say, I say," he ventured hesitatingly. "What about Hartley?"

"Ah! I wondered if you'd get to that." Lane straightened in his chair, and his dark eyes snapped. "I killed him. Your trooper, Brooks, was Paul Hartley."

"My word!" Captain Jack sat astonished. "What an extraordinary thing!"

"Rather," Lane agreed. "You see now why he came at me, shooting; he knew he was cornered, when he ran into me. But it was a good idea. Who would have thought of looking under the uniform of a Mounted Policeman for a bank wrecker from Omaha? That was where I had the best of the brothers Boland. They never knew who that dead policeman was; and so they tried to get away with me before he showed up. They expected him to be here, and they were puzzled when he didn't appear. You see?"

"My word!" Captain Jack repeated, with emphasis. "I say, have you told *her* all this?"

Lane nodded, and laughed softly at the blush that Stone could not keep from spreading over his face, clear to the roots of his Saxon hair. The captain noted Lane's quiet amusement and the broad smile that overspread the features of Kountz; and, springing from his chair, he took a turn about the room. Then he stopped suddenly, and held out his hand to Lane.

"I fancy I owe a good bit to you, old chap," he said earnestly. "And, hang me, I believe I'll collect a reward for bringing you in, after all. I say, I'll see you after a bit."

He picked up his hat, and made for the door. And, looking through the window which faced that way, Kountz and Lane grinned meaningly at each other, when they saw him hurrying, with long, purposeful strides, toward the hotel.

The Diplomacy of Danny Nugent

By Alfred Henry Lewis

Author of "Wolfville Folks," Etc.

The trouble with the East Side is not that there is too little romance there, but that there is too much romance. At any rate, that is the view of Mr. Lewis, and a statement on such authority is not open to argument. You don't usually associate romance with a prize fight, yet that is one of the delightful surprises in this capital little story, which exhibits the narrative genius of Mr. Lewis at his best. Mr. Lewis is writing several other good stories for the "Popular"—don't miss them.

THIS story was told me by the official referee one hot afternoon, when, for the breeze and the cool of it, we voyaged down to Staten Island on the ferryboat. The official referee is an esteemed friend of mine, whose society I frequent for the solvency of his morals and the soundness of his views. There were present—besides the official referee and myself—the public, and three fat Italians—the latter combined together after the manner of an orchestra—who, with two fiddles and a harp, gave us the "Beautiful Blue Danube." This music is an especial favorite of mine, and, for my share of what payment is ever due the piper, I rendered unto the chief troubadour twenty-five cents when he came round with the hat.

As I listened with one ear to the official referee, I listened to the troubadours with the other, my eyes meanwhile upon a long, rusty line of empty tramp steamers, anchored just outside the fairway, north of Robbin's Reef. I shall tell the story, as nearly as I may, in the words of the official referee, avoiding only terms of merest emphasis, that added nothing to the graphic beauty or yet to the pure lucidity of the tale.

There are folks who say we have no romance on the East Side. This is where they get in wrong; we have too much romance sometimes, as any one can see who will take a peek at the police records in Mulberry Street. Not that what Danny Nugent did, you understand, had anything criminal about it.

Danny was a member of my boxing club, the Chatham Square Athletic Association, and weighed one hundred and thirty pounds. He would have been better, of course, had he weighed one hundred and thirty-three pounds, which is the real thing in avoirdupois for a lightweight; but, do what you might, he could never be made to put on those other three pounds, and put them on right. Some day I'm going to revise the boxing weights; as it is, they're all to the bad. Among the big fellows—say, after you've gone above one hundred and sixty-eight pounds—a few pounds here or there don't count. But among the lightweights it's another story. To the little fellows, a difference of three pounds means more

than a difference of three hundred thousand tons would, if you were talking of mountains.

Danny was about twenty years old, and lived with his mother, in East Broadway. His old lady owned a little property, enough to see her through with the butcher and baker, and as for Danny, he was earning twelve dollars a week, learning how to be a machinist, with the Hoe press folks. He was a sober, quiet boy, Danny was; dressed always very natty, and everybody liked him; that is, everybody except old Jimmy Driscoll, who hadn't any use for anybody.

Old Jimmy lived in Henry Street, and owned a bunch of trucks and horses, and did a lot of the hauling along the docks. Being rich, and a widower, naturally, old Jimmy was sore on all hands, and the cook; so his failing to stand for Danny didn't mean anything.

As I've said, Danny was a member of my boxing club; but, while he could spar a little, and had a pretty good punch, he wasn't looked on as a star. The fact is, he was against fighting. He was for boxing, he said, because it was good exercise, and trained the eye and hand and foot to act together; but as to going to the floor with anybody seriously, he wouldn't have it.

I remember he pointed out how fighters never amounted to much; and that, to be the boss slugger of your class, meant that you were a dead one and a flat failure at everything else. While I didn't, and don't, admit this, I must confess the dope is more or less on Danny's side.

In his habits, Danny was as straight as a gun. He worked hard, kept himself clean and sober, looked after his mother, and seemed to be quite a hand to read. Many's the time I've met him chasing home from the library, a book under his wing. I never had much time for books myself, but all the same they're no bad scheme.

Besides the books there were the girls. In a kid way, and all perfectly harmless, Danny was a good deal of a lady killer, and at the balls we used to give he was sure to come out strong. If old Jimmy could have seen him doing a twostep with his little daughter, Mary Ellen, he'd have burned the block, for sure. But since old Jimmy never attended the balls, being too busy counting his pennies at home—for he was a close-fisted old tad—and hadn't any imagination to speak of, he never got the least impression of little Mary Ellen whisking about the hall, with either Danny or any of the other lads.

Little Mary Ellen's mother was dead. She, herself, was as pretty as she was good, with none of old Jimmy's ugly features, and not a little of his stubbornness. I think, too, she possessed something of her old man's knowledge of how many cents it takes to make a dollar; which is a fairly valuable piece of information, in its way, and calculated to save a lot of trouble, especially on the East Side, where the income game is played strictly with a limit.

Perhaps in calling the roll of Danny's good qualities, I ought to have begun by naming his diplomacy. He was what I call a diplomat. What is a diplomat? Well, he's a guy who, when he finds he can't buck the centre, knows how to go round the ends. That was Danny every time, as you shall see, if the boat doesn't sink and my voice holds out.

After what I've told you about him not liking to fight, you can guess my wonder when one evening Danny comes to me on the side, and makes the raw proposition that I match him—four-ounce mitts—for twenty rounds against the Williamsburg Terror.

Perhaps you'll understand it clearer if I explain that the Terror balanced the scales at one hundred and thirty-three, was as hard as a bag of nails, had already won six fierce battles, and was looked upon as a coming champion. Cutting his comb was a subject that no one under a Dixon or a McGovern had any license to talk about; so when Danny pulled me into a corner that evening, and said he would like a hack at him, I simply stared.

"You fight the Williamsburg Ter-

ror!" I said, getting my voice at last. "Man alive, he'd eat you up! He's got three pounds on you; and he's trimmed some of the toughest babies that ever pulled on gloves. Danny, you're crazy." And I meant it. "You ought to have your head examined—ought to be in the observation ward at Bellevue right now. Lads that get your kind of notions into their heads wind up in Bloomingdale playing with a string of spools."

All these things I said, and more. Danny took it quietly, but was there to the last with the original proposition. He wanted a twenty-round go with the Williamsburg Terror, and nothing short of it would do him.

"But why should he spar you?" I asked, at last, for Danny's sticking so obstinately began to make me tired. "Who are you that he should waste time in the ring over? He could go on right now with the best boys in the fighting game—go on where the loser's end would run into hundreds of dollars. And yet you seem to think he'll jump at the opportunity to take a clout at you for fun!"

"No 'for fun' about it," protested Danny. "I want to box him for two hundred and fifty dollars a side."

That "two hundred and fifty dollars a side" settled it. When I heard that, I knew the bats were busy building nests in Danny's belfry, and had come to stay.

"Two hundred and fifty a side!" I repeated. "Now, who d'you think would be weak-minded enough to chance that amount on you? Against a boy, too, who's landed six stiff ones, and never had a fall down!"

Danny wasn't to be shaken off; not he. He said he'd put up two hundred and fifty on himself.

It took my breath away. I've seen a few fighters in my day, but this was the first I'd ever met who talked of backing himself. Generally, they feel that they've done their share when they've signed articles to take a hammering; and, between you and me and the jackstaff forward, I think they're right, at that. But here was Danny, cool and steady, and ready to put up for himself.

"Where's the money?" I said; for only the sight and the feel of it would convince me.

"It's here," said Danny, and with that, sure enough he comes across with the stuff. I counted it, and there it was—five fifty-dollar bills.

"Well," said I, sticking it in my pocket, "I'll try what I can do. By showing them Williamsburg robbers the money, I shouldn't wonder if I got you a match. It'll look so easy they'll eat it up."

"Good!" said Danny, while a hopeful look stole across his face. He had the manner of one whose troubles were about over; which made it seem the more strange to me, who thought they had just begun.

"There's another matter, however," he continued. "If you, yourself, want any of this, you must arrange to make it on the gate. When I win I'll need the whole two hundred and fifty dollars, d'you see? It's for a particular purpose."

"That's all right," I returned. "If you win, you certainly ought to have the whole two hundred and fifty, and no one would dream of trying to cut in between you and any part of it. This is a hard world, but not quite so hard as that."

The match was made all right. When I showed those Williamsburg people the two hundred and fifty, their greedy eyes glistened, and they were all for taking possession of it right there. They looked upon it as so surely theirs they couldn't see the use of waiting.

We picked out a stakeholder, and signed up to box Marquis of Queensberry rules, the event to come off in Brooklyn—neutral territory—six weeks from the date of the articles. While I was about it, I put in a sly plug for Danny, by telling one of the Williamsburg murderers—in strict confidence, of course—that Danny was weak in the head. He was crazy about boxing, I said, and his friends thought a good trimming would do him good. As for the two hundred and fifty, they figured

the cure ought to be cheap at the price. It wasn't so much a boxing match, I explained, taking it from the viewpoint of Danny's friends, as a method of getting Danny's head on straight. A stiff jolt or two from the Terror ought to dissipate his delusions. I held to this line of talk, so's the Terror would think the thing a walk-over and lay down on his training. Boxers are the laziest beggars; and the most contrary. At the very time they ought to do nothing but train, training is the one thing they hate to do most; and they'll lie and skulk and fake—anything to avoid training—until there's been times when I felt like slaughtering them.

Twenty three-minute rounds, with only a minute between, is no child's play, and Danny seemed very much alive to it. There was no skulking, no shirking about his work; he went at his training as though empires depended on his being fit. You don't want to hear the details. It's enough to say that he ran, walked, boxed, wrestled, swung clubs, skipped rope, and took his grub and rub-downs precisely as I ordered; and all as meek as Moses.

Not once did he try to give me an argument, but was as faithful and docile to his duties as a man has a right to expect of his lawful wedded wife. I grew to love the boy, he behaved that well, and I could only wish the job ahead was softer.

Not that Danny's confidence grew shaky in the knee. He didn't say much, but it stood out as plain as paint that he never doubted but he'd quit a winner. There was nothing to it. Down deep in his heart, I could see that Danny was as game as a hornet. His confidence, however, didn't breed confidence in me. I knew what the Terror could do, and attributed Danny's sure-thing feeling to simple ignorance. It merely meant that he couldn't realize what he was up against —a common failing of boxers.

My belief that Danny would lose didn't cause me to throw off in the work of getting him ready. I did all I knew. I gave him as fine an assortment of articles to spar with—a new one every day—as any boy ever held up his hands to. They put a feather edge on Danny, too, and showed him many a wrinkle.

Why, such a topnotcher as Kid McCoy even put in five afternoons with Danny; and if there's a trick in the boxing game that McCoy isn't wise to, I never heard its name. Particularly, he taught Danny that old McCoy stunt of winding the hands with tape, rubbed full of plaster of paris. When your hands are tight bound with this tape, you thrust them into water; and after that they aren't hands, they're two clubs. Sure, they would be inside the gloves, but they'd make themselves felt all the same.

When I brought Danny to the ringside that Brooklyn evening, he was as fine as silk. He couldn't have been in better fettle if the stakes had been his life. I'd taken every outside precaution, too. There was a fellow of mine planted in the audience, with a stopwatch, who was to shout "Chatham Square!" just ten seconds before the close of a round. This was to save Danny unnecessary labor. It's not worth while to try and knock a man out, if the round's so near its end there's no space to work in the count —see?

Also, I made sure that there was everything in Danny's corner that the heart of man could desire. To make finally sure of the handling, I went back of Danny myself. I forgot to say that Danny weighed in at one hundred and twenty-nine pounds, four pounds under the Terror. It was big odds, but as I looked at him—eyes like diamonds, skin satin, every muscle rubber—I was proud to go behind him.

"Remember, Danny," I said, as he came from the dressing room, "it's twenty rounds, eighty minutes, and you mustn't throw yourself away in the go-off. Cool and easy's the word; for the journey's a long one, and it'll take all your strength and all your vitality to go the route."

You may not understand, not being professional, how much this advice was

needed. There's nothing so burns a man up as a fierce contest inside the ropes. Let me show you: Take the Jeffries-Sharkey bout at Coney Island. Both men had been trained to where no ordinary work would take off another ounce. And, yet, when that gruelling battle was over, what do you think? Sharkey weighed thirteen pounds and Jeffries sixteen pounds less than when they crawled through the ropes. That's straight goods. One man loses thirteen and the other sixteen pounds in, say, a little over an hour and a half. Can you beat it?

When I gave Danny that warning about saving himself, so's he would last the distance, he looked up, jaw iron, eye gray agate, and said: "Don't you fool yourself. There won't be no twenty rounds."

There's a queer look on his face when he got this off. I've refereed scores and scores of battles, but I never before saw just that look. "That boy," said I to myself, "is here to win or get killed." And, by this and that, I could see the business was serious.

The referee—he was from Jersey City, and an all-right sort—had the two into the centre, and expounded the rules. They were to break clean, and no fighting in the clinches.

The pair shook hands, and sat back in their corners again.

"Time!" cried the referee.

The Terror stood an inch over Danny and, being one of those who box high, he looked even taller than that. He covered his head and neck fairly well, but his body wasn't half defended. This ought to be water on Danny's wheel; for his instructions had been to fight low, and try for the heart.

At the go-off, the Terror walked into Danny as though he were a plum cake. He tried a straight left, but Danny wasn't there. Then came a swing; no go; Danny slipped inside. As they disengaged, Danny sent in a right hook that caused the Terror's teeth to click together like the jaws of a rat trap. It made him ugly, too, and the next moment he was swarming all over Danny, like a cat over a shed roof.

It was slam! bang! slug! smash! swing!—a perfect tempest of blows. You'd have thought the Terror had twenty hands. For all that, he wasn't landing. Danny's sparring was beautiful; it was like clockwork. Not but what those awful rallies would rock him; but he'd right himself, each time, like a ship after the smash of some heavy sea. And through it I could make out that hard look of win or die, which showed his heart was where it belonged.

In the second round, the Terror came to the centre like a cat. Quick as a flash, he feinted with his left, and then, with a right swing that came home like a flash of lightning, he floored Danny as flat as a field of turnips. It fetched my heart into my mouth. I thought it was all over.

But, no, Danny gets onto one knee, his head drooping a little forward. The referee began: "One! Two!" and so on.

At "Eight!" I gave Danny the office.

"Up!" I cried.

To tell the truth, I didn't much think Danny would make it. I was abroad in my judgment. To my delight, Danny, at the word, straightened up strong.

It was no use; the Terror was after him like a whirlwind. Down went Danny again. Again he was up, only to hunt the floor. So it went, fast and furious—the Terror a tiger. He dropped Danny eight times in that one round. And, yet, every time I said "Up!" there was Danny on his two feet again.

When I got hold of Danny, at the sound of the gong, I could tell he was dazed. I planted him in his chair, hartshorn under his nose, a lump of ice at the back of his head. Then I worked the towels.

"How about it?" I whispered.

"I'll do," he said.

Between the towel and the hartshorn and the ice, Danny was getting the fog out of his brain and breath into his body. I knew how he felt, for I'd been there. You don't realize it, never having had a slugging, but what Danny

had gone through would act the same as throwing a veil over the wits. You'd know things; you'd see things; but only in a blurred, dim way. I was anxious, but still I could make out that Danny was rounding to. I gave him the whisper to play cunning; and so, when "Time!" came for the third round, he pretended to stagger as he got up, and went, weaving and wandering to the centre, his head on his right arm, as though he was all but in.

It was a trap, and the Terror walked into it. In he rushed to put on the finishing touch, and I could see by his face that he was already thinking what he'd buy with Danny's two hundred and fifty.

It wasn't to be, however; you know the old gag about the cup and the lip. As the Terror came on, wide open and careless, Danny's left shot up—as clean a hook as ever came off. It caught the Terror under the chin, and jarred his head back.

It was only a short half-arm jolt, and, naturally, didn't have the steam required to put the Terror to sleep for the count. But it was a good start; for, as the Terror's head went back, and before he could recover his balance, Danny whipped over his right to the jaw. There was go enough to that, I promise you, and the Terror—all out—wilted forward into Danny's arms, and from there to the floor, as limp as a wet towel.

Sure, he was out, and twenty seconds to spare. The mob, looking on, came near tearing the house down. It took all I could do, and a dozen cops to help me, to keep them from pulling Danny to pieces in their joy. The Terror? Why, he wasn't hurt. In ten minutes you wouldn't have known, except from his sore expression, that he'd ever seen the inside of a ring.

That knock-out thing to the jaw don't amount to much. This is how it is. The glove lands on the big artery, the jugular vein they call it, where it comes over the jaw. The blood is jolted into the brain, and for the blink of a moment out goes your light. Ask any boxer, and he'll tell you that it feels as though you'd been hit on top of the head with a mallet. That's why, when a party's knocked out by a blow to the jaw, he falls forward on his face. It's the same as if he's struck from the rear. It doesn't take any great strength; a woman could knock you out, if she only happened to put one over on you in the proper place.

It makes me hot when I hear talk about the brutality of the boxing game. Two healthy, well-trained lads couldn't really hurt one another in a hundred years. There's more pain and bloodshed any busy morning in a dentist's shop than you'd hear of in the prize ring in a month of Sundays. And as for brutality, do you call a set-to, between boys, matched to a hair for weight and condition, half as brutal as some husky of a school teacher with a big ruler, mauling the life out of a kid of ten? I don't; nor any part of it.

But to go back to Danny. In the dressing room, when he's shifting his togs, I said: "Fine, for yours, my boy. I never saw anything that beat, or even tied, it. You got there with bells on." You see I was all keyed up over Danny's victory. "From now on I can get you all the fights you want," I said.

Danny looked up—he was four times as cool and easy as I was.

"That's it," he says, with a little grin. "But d'ye see, I don't want 'em. This is the only fight I'll ever make."

It had been a case of Queer Street from the beginning; but, busy with the arrangements, and looking forward to the bout, and all that, I didn't really have the time to look it over. Now, when Danny, on the heels of a contest that'd make him talked of everywhere between the oceans, and had landed him in the championship class, handed it out as cool as spring water that he's gone as far as he would, I couldn't guess the riddle.

"Give it a name!" I said. "If this is where you get off, what did you start for? What's the idea of climbing to the landing, if you don't want to go to the top of the stair?"

"That's all right," he said; "you'll know more later on."

Then, his street clothes being on, and him looking as though he'd come out of a bandbox rather than a stiff mix-up with the hardest proposition, bar one or two, in the one-hundred-and-thirty-pound class, he asked for the money. I counted it over to him, having collected from the stakeholder; there it was, ten fifty-dollar bills, instead of the original five.

Danny took it, and stuffed it down into his jeans, and I could tell that it wasn't going to see the light again unless there was a reason. For myself, I cleared about three hundred on the door, after the expenses had been paid.

We went back by the bridge, and all the way over I kept wondering what had set Danny after the Terror. Turn and twist the matter as I might, however, I never could get a glimpse of the bug under the chip.

It was all made plain, though, when, forty-eight hours later, the word went through the ward that Danny had run over to Jersey, and got married to old Jimmy's little Mary Ellen. It all came out then.

It seems that evenings, while old Jimmy's in back, counting up the truck receipts for the day, and finding fault with the hay bills, the noble Danny's hanging over the front fence, sparking little Mary Ellen. Sure, if old Jimmy had caught him at it he'd have set the dog on him.

Danny gave me the rights of it. Little Mary Ellen, who possessed old Jimmy's prudence, wouldn't hear to a runaway unless the thing looked like a winner. They could get along on Danny's twelve dollars every Saturday night; that would take care of the rent and the corned beef and cabbage. But how about the four-room flat she had her black eyes on, and the money to furnish it? That would mean five hundred dollars, anyway you went about it.

"Show me the five hundred," said little Mary Ellen, "and I'm yours. But there'd be no sense in landing ourselves in Dutch."

Danny saw the point, and was free to admit it; the trouble was, where should he look for the five hundred? Rake and scrape and do his best, the most he could get together was two hundred and fifty dollars. Every day, too, it became plainer and plainer that life without little Mary Ellen would be a failure. So, after looking it up one way and down the other, Danny saw nothing for it but a hack at the Terror.

And there you are! Say, you've heard of your altars, and your fires, and the green graves of your sires, and the balance of that box of tricks, but you missed the real thing in battles when you weren't at the ringside the night Danny went over the ropes for little Mary Ellen and that four-room flat.

Certainly, old Jimmy forgave 'em; it always comes out that way. He stuck it out for a year, old Jimmy did, as hard as brass; but along about the second Christmas, little Mary Ellen had a baby, and that settled it. Nothing would do old Jimmy then but the baby; and, to get the baby, he had to stand for Danny. So he took the whole outfit home with him, and there they are to-day.

Old Jimmy's withdrawn from business now, minding the baby—a boy, baptized "James Driscoll," after old Jimmy, takes up so much of his time, leaving my bold Danny to keep the books and rule over the trucks.

THE TIME OF NIGHT

A NOVEL device has been invented for use in hotels. A small telephone receiver is connected to the head of the bed in each room, and may be placed under the pillow if desired. It is connected to a master clock. When the occupant of the room wishes to know the time, he places the phone to his ear and presses a button. A set of gongs will then strike the hour, the quarter, and the number of minutes past the quarter.

The Furnace

By Louis Joseph Vance

Author of "The Pool of Flame," "The Brass Bowl," Etc.

In his own picturesque way of story-telling Mr. Vance chronicles the adventures of a strong-minded American who, to save a friend, follows a trail of blood that leads through the most hazardous enterprises and carries him to the borders of the Caspian Sea at the moment that the world is shrinking in horror from the tale of the Armenian massacres.

(A Two-Part Story—Part I.)

CHAPTER I.

MAYFAIR.

JOHN RUTHVEN occupied an easy-chair in the smoking room of the Primordial Club, on the afternoon of one August day. The chair was placed next one of the windows that overlook the Victoria Embankment and the Thames; Ruthven was pleasantly conscious of the deep hum of the swarming city that was borne in to him by a faint, weary breeze, sultry with the breath of London.

By turning his head he could have seen the golden reaches of the river, broken by the black silhouettes of its massive bridges, dotted with slow-moving barges, with their slanted sails of Indian red, and with quick-darting little ferry steamers, churning the yellow waters with their sidewheels; the magnificent stretch of the embankment, crawling with hansoms; the spires of Westminster and the Houses of Parliament in the distance, looming splendidly through the heat haze.

In a word, Peace was at his elbow—the peace of civilization as we understand it, of ordered lives and a humdrum world, was all about him, encompassing, protecting him.

But Ruthven did not look. His gaze, instead, was fixed intently upon the paper which he held spread before him; and he was breathing rather more quickly than was his wont; there was, further, an odd light in his eyes. And Ruthven was one accounted by those who knew him a man unemotional, an imperturbable man, very reserved and self-contained.

Presently, with a quiet gesture, he laid aside the paper, as if putting it, with the cause of his mental disturbance, altogether out of his mind. Which was not the case at all; for he accompanied the action with a low-spoken comment, inaudible a yard away:

"This will kill him—if true."

He tapped the bell on the table, at the same time taking up and relighting a short and villainous-looking wooden pipe. In the course of a minute or so, a cat-footed waiter answered his summons.

"Did you ring, sir?"

"See if Mr. Tynan is in the club, if you please."

"Yes, sir."

The waiter was gone but a moment.

"He hasn't been in for about a fortnight, sir," he announced, returning.

"Thank you. You may bring my check, and call a hansom, please."

Ruthven remained passive while he waited. Another man, a prey to such nervous excitement as beset him, would have fidgeted or paced the room. Ruthven was otherwise constituted; like most strong men, he wasted no strength in useless exercise; he husbanded his powers jealously until the instant of need—when he was apt to expend them lavishly.

As he arose, accepting his hat and walking stick from the waiter's hand, what had not been obvious before became apparent—that, without being in any way remarkable for inches, either as to height or breadth, he was extremely well-proportioned and well-knit. His face was thin and keen, a bit angular of feature—indeed, somewhat suggestive of the aboriginal American Indian; to which resemblance color was lent by a complexion, originally swarthy, and now further darkened by a heavy coat of sunburn. In point of fact, he was an American.

The hansom stood waiting at the curb. Ruthven climbed upon the step, and quietly told the cabman, "Clement's Inn"; but somehow the cabby knew that his fare was in a hurry and was good for a generous tip in reward for fast driving. Cabbies get to be good judges of human nature, as a rule; that is why they always overcharge the diffident young man, who hates what he calls "a scene," and pays to avoid it.

So this shrewd driver insured his tip by making very fair time between Adelphi Terrace and the Strand.

The lift boy in the venerable gray-stone pile, a dull youth of notable difficulty with his aspirates, could only inform Ruthven that Mr. Tynan had gone away, and expected to be absent for some months. He didn't rightly know his haddress, but Mr. 'Arding, who 'ad sublet Mr. Tynan's room, was in, and could probably supply the information.

Ruthven accordingly suffered himself to be conveyed to the top floor at that leisurely and reassuring pace so characteristic of the English elevator, and so exasperating to an American in a hurry, and, walking down a long corridor, knocked at a door whose panels bore the name of Gregory Tynan. A heavy voice bade him enter, and he did so, to find a young and dandified young man making himself free of Tynan's belongings—his feet on a priceless mahogany desk, two centuries old, and his whisky-and-soda glass making rings on a Sheraton side table, with that refreshing familiarity typical of the tribe of subtenants.

Mr. Harding could and did give Ruthven part of the information he desired; Mr. Tynan had left London some two weeks since for some place in the Transcaucasus—Baku was the name, if Mr. Harding remembered aright.

"Baku?" repeated Ruthven thoughtfully. "Did he go alone?"

"I believe he did," agreed the other. "As correspondent to some newspaper or other."

"You don't recall the precise paper?"

Mr. Harding regretted that he did not.

Ruthven thanked him, and took his leave. There was a slight shadow on his brow, to be recognized only by the unusually observant, as he paused in the courtyard of the inn, and looked at his watch. It was now after six, and Ruthven had a dinner "on" that night. He was thinking that he was sorry he had accepted the invitation, *now;* but he could see no decent way out of it, and, furthermore, it was time to return to his own chambers, and dress. But he must try to manufacture some excuse for getting away early.

While dressing, he discovered that excuse, in the shape of a square white envelope on his mantelpiece—an invitation to a dance to be held that night, or, rather, the next morning, at the house of a lady of title, who prided herself on her skill as a huntress of social lions. Ruthven was well acquainted with the lady's hobby, and,

under ordinary circumstances, would have acknowledged it by a note, gracefully regretting his inability, etc. But in this instance, he was inclined to welcome it; and, after knitting his brows over it for a long time, he dressed with unusual care—and with that sense of fastidious luxury known only to men enjoying their first taste of town life after many months' residence in one of those places whose odd names you'll find on the map—and slipped the square of engraved cardboard into his pocket before going out.

And thus it came about, that at thirty minutes past eleven the same evening, he was standing on the threshold of a ballroom in Mayfair, responding courteously to the greetings of his hostess, and, simultaneously, gazing abstractedly past her, as though in search of some familiar face.

That, in fact, was precisely his occupation; but it was ten minutes later ere he found himself confronting the object of his quest, devouring her with his eyes and—from the bottom of his heart wishing himself anywhere else.

She, too, was an American—a girl tall and fair to look upon, tastefully and splendidly gowned, as was to be expected of one of her countrywomen. Very slender, and yet well made, gifted uncommonly with graciousness and not too much assurance, there was something of hauteur in her bearing; an effect moderated by eyes dark for all her fairness, giving an effect of piquancy to her loveliness.

Inasmuch as without her, though she appears but this once, there would have been no story, this slight digression into personal description may be pardoned. A mainspring is essential to a watch; and if one is to understand the workings of the watch, one must comprehend the mainspring.

This girl had seen Ruthven when he appeared in the doorway, and had recognized him instantly, although it was a matter of a year or so since they had last met. And she had been conscious for several minutes that he was working his way through the crowd toward the spot where she sat, with her appropriate little circle of courtiers. But when, at last, he had gained place before her, she turned and held out her hand, with a pretty, if misleading, simulation of surprise.

"Mr. Ruthven!" she said gayly. "This *is* unexpected—and a pleasure."

"Ruthven!" commented that gentleman to himself. "Used to be 'Jack.'" Aloud, he said, with the direct truthfulness that made women like him, because it made him different from other men and themselves: "I thought I should find you here to-night. That's why I came—Miss Annerley," he added gravely, as an afterthought.

"But I had no idea you were in London," she protested. "The last word we had of you, you were in—South Africa?"

"West coast of Africa," he corrected pleasantly. Inwardly, he winced. "I landed only this morning—and now I want the next dance."

Laughing, the girl surrendered her card. "But——"

"I know I'm not a dancing man," assented Ruthven; "so you'll have to sit it out with me—early as it is."

"I'm glad that I had the dance free, then," said the girl sincerely.

"So am I, especially when I observe that every other one is taken. I did want to talk to you, and I must hurry away presently."

By now she had risen, and taken his arm, and they were threading a slow way through the dancers. The girl saw that he knew his ground perfectly and was guiding her toward the conservatory.

"If any one had told me, a month ago, that I should be here to-night," he said, "I'm afraid I should have been rude to them."

She laughed again—perhaps a trifle consciously. "Where were you a month ago?"

"On a smelly river, about fifty miles from the coast," he returned; "camping in the jungle, and wondering, between doses of quinine, if I'd live to see salt water again."

"Why?" she demanded, glancing at him quickly. "Fever?"

"Partly that," admitted Ruthven, "and partly because of one of the natives, whom some one had bribed to put pulverized glass in my breakfast food. I caught him at it a day or so later, and—put a stop to that."

The girl shuddered. "You must tell me," she said, releasing his arm, and sitting down upon a little iron bench in full view of the dancing floor. "Why did they want to—to kill you?"

"I made myself unpopular with some Portuguese," said Ruthven, smiling grimly, "by finding out things about the slave trade, and telling on them. But—forgive me, that isn't what I am here to see you about."

There came the very least trace of a cloud to shadow the brilliancy of the girl's eyes; she lowered her lashes, looking down at her hands, and telling herself that she might have known what was coming.

Oddly enough, she was entirely mistaken in her man; Ruthven had not the slightest intention of asking her to marry him a second time, though his first words seemed to confirm her suspicion.

"I wanted to tell you a little story," he said, turning toward her, and lowering his voice a shade. "May I? Don't be afraid; it's just about two men I once knew."

She gave him a swift, sidelong glance and murmured something all but inaudible, but which he took for an assent.

"Just to be mysterious," he went on, "we'll call the men Damon and Pythias—partly for that reason and partly because they thought a lot of one another; more than men do, commonly. Unfortunately, they both fell in love with the same girl, and—well, the girl liked him whom we'll call Pythias best, it seemed. So Damon went away, and stayed away for a long time, fully expecting to find Pythias and the girl married when he came back.

"Do you mind?" he asked suddenly. "I haven't any right to speak to you about this, I know, except the right of friendship for—for you both."

He noticed that the girl drew in her under lip suddenly, and that her eyes were become more brilliant than ever. But she kept her profile toward him, and spoke without looking up.

"What is it you want to know?" she asked, in a guarded tone.

"Where Gregory Tynan is," he replied quickly, "and why."

There was a little pause, broken at length by the girl. "Mr. Tynan," she said steadily, "has gone to the Transcaucasus, as correspondent to the *Daily Recorder*. He gave me to understand that he went because the proprietors of the paper made him an extraordinary offer."

"To go and get killed," commented Ruthven, perhaps a bit cruelly.

"Oh!" cried the girl softly, starting, and losing color. "It—it won't be as bad as that?" she appealed.

"I hope not. It won't be, if I can help it. But it is a singular fact that every correspondent who has gone to Baku since the February massacres has been shot—by accident, of course—or has disappeared, never to turn up again. This is something I don't pretend to understand, but it is so. That is why I am worried."

He stopped, eying the girl with the unwavering fixity of a surgeon watching a patient under the knife. He saw the ebb and flow of blood in her cheeks, the trembling of her lashes, the quiver, quickly repressed, of her scarlet lips, the quickened rise and fall of her chest, the little muscular contraction in her throat—saw, and wondered how much of it was real, how much acting.

Two years' absence from the haunts of men, two years' living in the wilds, where more often than not one's life depends upon swiftness of thought and sureness of deduction, tend to sharpen wits and to quicken powers of observation wonderfully.

The silence this time was longer than before, but, as before, the girl was the first to break it.

"I think you must know you are hurting me dreadfully."

"I'm sorry," he returned simply.

"What is it you want to know?"

"Why Tynan went to Baku."

The girl's white fingers contracted on her fan, and still she kept her face averted.

"I suppose," she said, looking before her, "that the blame was altogether mine. You and the world would say so, at all events. I was a little tired of waiting, and——"

"Fortunes," he interposed, as she paused, "are not made in a day, by one's pen."

"I know, I know. I didn't mean it really, but—but we quarreled. To—to teach him a lesson, as I thought, I returned his ring. Then—he accepted the *Recorder* offer."

"And—you are content?"

"No-o," brokenly.

"Have you heard——"

"Not a line."

"But if you did hear?"

She sat suddenly bolt upright, and smiled proudly. "Gregory should know," she said.

"I am answered, then," said Ruthven slowly. "What I read in the papers is not true, I gather?" She did not answer. "Did you know," he pursued mercilessly, "that George Wallis is the principal stockholder in the Recorder Company?"

The girl caught sharply at her breath. "What do you mean, Jack?"

"Are you going to marry George Wallis?"

"You have no right——"

"I know it. But are you?"

"I can't wait forever." The girl arose, with a set, strained smile. "Here comes my partner for the next dance."

"One minute, please, Katherine." There was a peremptory note in Ruthven's voice that made the girl pause, however unwillingly. "If you marry Wallis," he continued hurriedly. "You'll kill Tynan. There is one chance in a hundred that he may be saved. I'm starting for the Transcaucasus by the first boat. Will you give me two months to find him and bring him to his senses? Will you withhold your answer to Wallis for sixty days from to-night?"

The girl hesitated. "I—I—yes!" she stammered, as a young man hurried up, face aglow. Then she turned, and smiled radiantly on Ruthven. "Good night, Mr. Ruthven. I hope I shall see you before you sail."

"You won't," said Ruthven grimly, when she was out of hearing. And then: "Poor Gregory!"

He was not at all a man to yield to and act upon impulse; as an ordinary thing, he mistrusted his impulses. When he found it necessary to strike, for instance, he struck both swiftly and unexpectedly, and the stroke was generally so effective as to seem the fruit of inspiration. But this was not the case at all; the weight and the unerring accuracy of Ruthven's blows simply meant that he had foreseen the necessity of striking, had predetermined when and where the blow must fall.

But this night he was to yield twice to impulses, and against his better judgment—the first time because he yearned for news of Gregory Tynan; the second through sheer, boyish instinct for mischief.

Within thirty minutes from the time he left Katherine Annerley, he was mounting a long and dirty flight of steps that leads to the editorial offices of the *Recorder*—mentally admitting that he was a fool to be there. But he did not pause. Irresolution had no part in him. He went ahead, and a moment or so later was standing by a big, flat-topped desk, littered with clippings, papers, proof sheets damp from the galleys, typewritten copy, and copy hastily scribbled in pencil, pens, unpleasant-looking mucilage bottles, ink pots, cigars, pipes, cigarette stubs, boxes of matches, and all the necessary paraphernalia of a managing editor's desk in the office of a great daily.

At the farther side of the desk, a man sat in a revolving chair with broken springs—a perspiring man in shirt sleeves, furiously engaged in scrawling inky hieroglyphics over many sheets of clean paper; a man who had not even deigned to look up when Ruthven calmly pushed aside part of the conglomeration of rubbish and seated himself on the edge of the table.

But presently the man put down his pen, pounded the final sheets of inscribed paper with a wad of blotters, looked up, and grunted, "Ruthven, by George!" and immediately began to beat a metallic tatoo on the call bell at his elbow. A small and extremely dirty youth answered the summons, seized the "copy" from the editorial hand, and vanished into the murk of the reporters' room. And the editor leaned his fat carcass back in the chair, smiled genially at his belated visitor, and offered him a cigar.

"Well, Ruthven, how goes it?" he inquired cordially. "Saw you were back from the coast by the morning paper. You've been having the devil of a lark down there, haven't you? I wish," he added, a shade plaintively, "that you'd been sending that stuff of yours to us, instead of the *Telegraph*. Next time you'd better come to us first and get our terms."

"That's precisely what I'm doing, Nankivell," said Ruthven. "I'm off to-morrow morning."

Mr. Nankivell stared. "The devil you are!" he grunted. "Why, man, you're just back."

"Hardly," rejoined Ruthven. "In town to-day—gone to-morrow. You don't call that back, do you?"

Nankivell had started to light his cigar. He paused, with the match in midair, as if doubtful of the advisability of taking such extreme measures; then, reflectively, blew the flame out. "Where to, now?" he demanded briskly.

"Baku."

"Baku!" The editor's round, moon-like face lengthened. "Baku! Too bad. We've just sent the best available man down there, Ruthven."

"What man?" inquired Ruthven, with interest.

"Tynan—believe you know him. He left a couple of weeks ago. If we hadn't had to give him such a hair-raising price to get him to go, why, I'd be glad enough to take you up. Still," he continued thoughtfully, "it seems to be the open season for correspondents in the Caucasus, and if you're bound to go—— Tell you what, Ruthven, come around to-morrow evening, and we'll talk it over, after I've seen the proprietors about it."

"Well——" Ruthven appeared to agree reluctantly, "I did think of going in the morning by the overland route. But there's a boat day after to-morrow, and, if you think it's worth my while, I may wait."

"Do," said Nankivell eagerly. "I think we can make you a good offer. Reliable stuff from that section of the map is as scarce as the proverbial hen's teeth just now, and yours ought to make ripping reading."

"Very well. We'll sleep on it, and have a talk." But Ruthven lingered. "Isn't war corresponding a little out of Tynan's line? I wonder that you got him to go at all."

"So do I," admitted the unsuspicious editor. "At first, he wouldn't hear of it. But Wallis—you know Wallis is everything here now—Wallis had apparently set his heart on Tynan, and gave me *carte blanche* as to terms."

"I see. To-morrow evening, then? Good night."

Ruthven had learned what he wished to. He shook the editor's fat, moist paw, and went quickly away, because he had many things to do before morning.

Now, his second impulsive error that night was consummated an instant or two after he had returned to his chambers. The telephone attendant was still at his post, and Ruthven, his eye lighting on the boy, had an inspiration, and yielded to temptation.

He turned to the directory, rustled the leaves for a bit, then gave the boy a number, and, stepping into the sound proof booth, closed the door tightly and lifted the receiver from the hook.

There followed a brief wait. Then a voice, a masculine voice, thrilled along the wire, out of the night:

"Are you there?"

"Hello!" returned Ruthven. "Is this 33-A, Artillery Mansions?"

"Yes. Who——"

"Is Mr. Wallis at home?"

"At the phone. But who——"

For a breath only, Ruthven hesitated; but it was not his way to fight in the dark. Having committed himself to folly, he threw caution to the winds—momentarily.

"Ruthven," he replied tersely; "John Ruthven. I want to ask you one question, Wallis."

"Why, how are you, Ruth? What is it? What can I do for you?"

"I want to know"—deliberately—"why you were so anxious to have Gregory Tynan go to Baku."

"What! Why—that's the devil of an odd thing to ring me up about at this hour, Ruthven."

"Yes?" Ruthven's voice was coldly interrogative.

"I wanted him because I thought him the best man, of course."

"A better than you, Wallis—eh? I thought so. That's all I wanted to know. Good night."

With which Ruthven hung up the receiver, and rang off, smiling.

But, "Damned ass!" he berated himself bitterly as he strode toward the lift.

CHAPTER II.

THE GEORGIAN ROAD.

Through the twilight of an evening made but the colder by the far-stretching shadow of the westerly mountain range, the Rostov-Baku train rattled past a nondescript aggregation of buildings, vaguely outlined masses in the gloaming, and with screeching brakes jarred to a standstill at the edge of an illuminated platform.

All day the train had crept—there is no other word, for it was on a Russian railway—up from the steppe, up the higher levels of the Terek valley, by long, almost imperceptible grades. Since morning, Ruthven had seen the peaks of the Caucasus, slowly edging, inch by inch, above the western and southern horizons. Now they ringed the prospect as with a wall of iron, monolithic, vast, sombre. Their shadow was like the shadow of another world, bleak and black; they dwarfed the earth beneath and rendered insignificant the firmament above, coming down, sheer and awful, to the plains, disdainful of foothills, immense and abrupt of contour.

As the American peered out of the window, they seemed ready to fall upon and crush him with the train; to blot out the little junction town and half the world beside. There was something terrifying and stifling in their grandeur. Ruthven shivered with the cold, and was glad that it was not for him to penetrate those tremendous fastnesses: that the railroad was to take him on east, east to the shores of the Caspian, skirting the feet of the mountains, and so, south, to his destination. He did not like mountains; high places alone disconcerted him of all the phenomena of nature.

Then he sank back in his rugs, lighted his pipe, and waited for the train to move on. It was unconscionably long about it, but he was growing accustomed to delays and setbacks; already he had spent two weeks on a trip which should have taken him less than one—by a route which he had selected because it was said to be quicker than the journey by water. The fact that this particular train was something like six hours behind its schedule no longer annoyed him; he was resigned and hopeful for the best.

But not so seemed his only companion in the carriage—a gaunt and sallow Armenian, who had entered the compartment with him at Rostov; who had not said two words to him in thirty-six hours; whose attentions to his fellow traveler had been confined to a few brief, cold glances; who sat like a statue, wrapped in profound and saturnine meditations, impenetrable to the world—and about whom, finally, Ruthven, in his ennui, had hazarded a thousand and one profitless conjectures.

These surmises had ranged every debatable point about the man, beginning with his nationality. It was only from his cast of feature that Ruthven had placed him an Armenian; his attire was noncommittal—not unlike Ruthven's own; he had whiled away the hours with novels in French and Italian; and

The few words he had passed with the guards had been in German. In the latter language, too, he had curtly declined Ruthven's offer of a drink from his private flask.

But Ruthven had long since concluded that the fellow was probably no more than an educated Armenian—most probably a traveler for, or a partner in, some Baku oil firm.

Now, as the wait dragged from the customary ten minutes into twenty and thirty, the Armenian began to exhibit signs of restlessness, fidgeting in his rugs, and grunting wrathfully to himself. Presently, the delay seemed to grow too much for him; his patience vanished; he unrolled himself from a cocoon of wrappings and went to the door.

To do this he had to pass Ruthven. "Pardon," he said courteously, as he stepped over the American's outstretched feet.

Ruthven looked up, surprised by this sudden thawing in the man's reserve.

"Oh, certainly," he mumbled, and eyed the fellow curiously.

The latter stood by the door, his hand on the knob, glaring angrily at the platform.

"These dogs!" he said abruptly, turning the handle. "I will go and see."

He stepped out, leaving Ruthven astounded. "Must like my face," he mused. "Can't account for it any other way."

He relapsed into a doze, from which he was roused by the reopening of the door some minutes later. His traveling companion stuck head and shoulders through the opening.

"There is trouble on the main line ahead," he volunteered curtly. "This train goes no farther."

"The devil's luck!" grumbled Ruthven, untangling himself from his rugs. "What sort of trouble?"

"Impossible to say. You can never learn anything from these infernal railway officials. The line is blocked. There may be no more trains east for several days—that is all they will say. Probably the revolutionists. You can't tell."

He stood, shredding a scrap of paper in his fingers, and staring sourly at Ruthven. "It is, indeed, the devil's luck," he agreed. "What will you do?"

Ruthven stood up and shook himself, stretching his arms. As he did so, his coat flapped wide and exposed the butt of a revolver. Upon this the gaze of the Armenian rested, transfixed, until Ruthven resumed a normal pose, and the weapon was again concealed.

"Do?" repeated the American, shivering in the cold air. "Hard to say. Let me think. The deuce of it is that I'm in all sorts of a hurry."

"Do you go to Baku?"

"Yes. At least, I want to—badly."

"And I. There is a way, of course."

"How?"

The man swept an arm toward the south. "By train to Vladikavkaz—a short ride—twenty-one versts. Then post over the Georgian Road to Tiflis—a day and a few hours, if you ride hard. From Tiflis, by rail to Baku, providing the Batoum-Baku road is running. That is a chance one must take."

"It's as good as kicking one's heels here, at least," considered Ruthven. "Shall you go that way?"

"If you do—and will share expenses."

"Agreed. When does the Vladikavkaz train start?"

"In ten minutes."

"Good enough." And Ruthven began to gather together his possessions, inwardly smiling at the very simple explanation of his motive in addressing him, which the Armenian had furnished by that proposition to share expenses. It was rather characteristic—canny. Your true Armenian is the Scotchman of Russia.

Ruthven bundled his belongings out upon the platform, had his luggage—a single, dilapidated leather trunk—removed from the train; and waited while the latter pulled out from the platform to make way for the Vladikavkaz local. In the course of an hour or so—an interval employed by the American in pacing backward and

forward in front of the station, and filling his lungs with deep draughts of the pure, frosty, mountain air—the local put in an appearance simultaneously with his Armenian acquaintance, who, for some reason or other, had seen fit to keep out of sight until the last moment.

He nodded Ruthven a brief greeting, and with him found an empty compartment. A little later, the train sauntered away on its fourteen-mile jaunt into the south.

Once in the carriage, the Armenian lapsed again into taciturnity, slouching dejectedly in a corner of the carriage as far removed from Ruthven as possible. He appeared to sleep. Possibly he did, from time to time. Ruthven, after one or two half-hearted attempts to get interested in a railway guide book, lighted a cigarette and—for want of something better to do—produced a revolver.

The Armenian sat up with a start, no longer sleepy. Ruthven paid him no heed, but chuckled inwardly. For its moral effect merely—not because he was a suspicious man by nature—he put a second weapon beside the first, on the rug that lay across his knees.

Then, slipping the catch, he broke one of the pistols at the grip, ejecting the cartridges. The Armenian was watching his every move with deepest interest. Snapping the catch to, again, Ruthven pulled the trigger half a dozen times, to assure himself that the mechanism worked smoothly; satisfied, he reloaded the chambers, put the revolver aside, and took up the other.

The Armenian cleared his throat, and spoke—again in German: "You go well armed, *mein Herr.*"

"Yes," returned Ruthven coolly.

"Do you always travel so?"

"Not always. But if the revolutionists, as you say, are playing hob with the railways, I may have need of these."

He twirled the cylinder with his thumb and forefinger, glanced down the barrel to see if it was clean, and, displeased with the condition he discovered there, searched in his pockets until he found a silk handkerchief; this he pulled through the barrel.

"You have a permit, *mein Herr?*"

"To carry arms? From the Russian government, you mean? In a way, yes. I'm a war correspondent, duly accredited."

"An Englishman?"

"American—much the same thing."

"Why do you carry the weapons in the pockets of your greatcoat, may I ask?"

"So that I may be able to put my hands on them when they're needed," said Ruthven, with a smile. "They wouldn't do me much good if I had them buttoned up in my hip pockets, would they? My experience with guns is that you don't need them once in a blue moon, but when you do need them, you need 'em badly, and right away. Hence these precautions."

He threw his cigarette stump away, put his heel on it, and leaned back, hands in the pockets where the revolvers were. He fancied that the Armenian eyed him wth smouldering distrust and alarm.

In the course of an hour from the time it had started, the train drew into Vladikavkaz terminal, and, thirty minutes later, Ruthven and the Armenian were hammering at the door of the diligence service office.

Because of the lateness of the hour—it was then nine, or thereabouts—the office was closed; but, thanks to the endeavors of the Armenian, it was not long ere a superintendent of the road traffic was routed out of one of the neighboring vodka buffets. His grumblings pacificed by a liberal tip—out of Ruthven's pocket—he set about the task of providing them with a suitable conveyance and a driver.

The ensuing two hours were filled in by interviews with various surly and reluctant drivers and a protracted session at the municipal police headquarters, where passports were ruthlessly scrutinized for proper visés, and many searching questions put to the two travelers, whose haste seemed highly suspicious to the gendarmerie.

Eventually, they were permitted to

start. A crazy and ramshackle conveyance, a venerable cross between a victoria and a barouche, drawn by four sturdy and shaggy gray horses, two at the pole, two on the sides, with extra traces, was assigned to them under the care of a sour and disgruntled Albanian driver.

Ruthven and the Armenian climbed in and wrapped themselves with layers of heavy rugs, proof against the rare mountain air, which now blew nipping keen down the slopes from the high, cold stars.

The breath of the horses hung upon the air like steam, dimly luminous. Ruthven snuggled down, burying his nose in the folds of his muffler, squirming about like a cat in his wrappings until he was comfortable. He was aware of a sense of odd exhilaration; his eyes gleamed uncommonly bright beneath the brim of his hat.

The driver cracked his whip, and with appropriate blasphemy anathematized his horses. They stepped out smartly, and broke into a brisk, mile-devouring stride, their hoofs ringing frostily on the hard and even surface of the great military highway. The base of the mountains drew swiftly nearer, and Ruthven found that his first impression had been accurate enough —they came down precipitously to the barren, brown steppe. There was only the long slope, a swelling rise or two, like the long undulations of a peaceful ocean, and then—the hills were all about them, rising, scarp upon scarp, in thousand-foot leaps to their star-attaining peaks.

Now and again, the four white walls of a government posting station, with its cluster of dark outhouses and stables, would flash past. At Lars—the second on the route—they halted for a hurried exchange of horses, then plugged steadily onward and upward, always gradually ascending. Beyond Lars, the bare granite walls of the hills seemed to close in about them threateningly; the road and the Perek's brawling torrent became cramped and confined in the narrow passage; the star-sheeted skies above narrowed to a mere, glittering ribbon, like a black-spangled scarf; and the noise of their progress rose sharp and, in a way, unseemly, as if a profanation of the sublime silence of the hills.

The Armenian, who sat opposite Ruthven, back to the driver, and who had been apparently asleep, bent forward suddenly, and laid a hand on Ruthven's shoulder. The American, startled by the unlooked-for interruption of his thoughts, turned his eyes to the man instantly.

"Were you sleeping?" asked his companion.

"No."

"This is the world-famous Gorge of Dariel, *mein Herr*. I thought you would like to know."

"Thank you."

Ruthven shrugged his shoulders, and nestled back in his rugs; at the same time he felt in his pockets for his revolvers. The touch of them seemed to reassure him, somehow; strangely enough, he felt himself falling a prey to an unaccountable excitement, an uneasiness. Instinctively, he seemed to scent danger—why, he could not surmise. But there was no more desire for sleep, and he did not once close his eyes.

The night wore itself out to the tune of hammering hoofs. In the pale dawn-light, the ascent began in deadly earnest, up grades steeper than any they had theretofore encountered. For miles the road, hewn out of the living rock of the mountainsides, ran beneath long, awning-like avalanche proofs, builded solidly of heavy timbers, beneath which belated shadows of the night still lurked; and it was in this artificial gloom that Ruthven became aware of a sensation of real distrust of the Armenian, whose eyes he felt fixed steadily upon him from the moment they rattled into the entrance to one tunnel until the moment that they crashed out again into the immaculate light of new day. But he laughed at his fears, and attributed them to the strangeness of the ride.

At the halfway house, between Kazbek and Kobi, they breakfasted raven-

ously, their appetites rendered as keen as two-edged swords by the action of the mountain air. And, thereafter, despite the quantities of questionable coffee, steaming hot, which he had forced down his gullet, Ruthven began to be sensible of a drowsiness.

It was then the shank of the afternoon; and it is small wonder that he should have become conscious of fatigue. He had hardly closed his eyes for thirty-six hours, and for the past twelve or fourteen had traveled at a breakneck speed with the chill breeze of their progress blowing always fiercely in his face. Small wonder that he nodded, eyelids heavy, brain bemused, apprehensions benumbed and forgotten for the time.

Once he caught himself napping briefly. When he brought himself, with a startled jerk, back to consciousness, the Armenian was rousing him, to point out the stone cross and pillar that mark the highest elevation of the Pass. From then on, the descent was abrupt, dropping in great swoops to the lowlands; and the vehicle that bore them seemed fairly to swim through the air.

They had changed drivers at Kasbek, and the new one drove like the very devil, spurred by the promise of a bonus staggering to one in his station of life. He made light of the most frightful risks, and even whipped his plunging horses—there were but two, now that the summit was passed—down descents so sheer as to seem little better than a toboggan slide.

But Ruthven was weary and, seasoned traveler that he was, well aware that there is much safety in high speed. Unfearing, he dozed and nodded, though flung from side to side of the vehicle with distressing frequency.

And it was from one of these half-naps that he awoke to find himself struggling for his life.

What he had dimly apprehended had at length come to pass; the Armenian had him by the throat, while the diligence dashed at top speed along the very edge of a precipice. The driver on his seat, oblivious to the struggle going on behind him, leaned forward, encouraging his horses with shrill, half-savage cries and sharp, pistol-like cracks of the whiplash.

Ruthven's hopes for interference had flown in his first fully wakeful moment to the driver. Now, too late, he remembered that the man was a Lezghin, speaking a patois totally unknown to the American; so that the negotiations for his reward had, of necessity, been carried on by the Armenian. And, in the present situation, Ruthven could not doubt but that the latter had deliberately purchased the fellow's deafness and consequent silence.

It seemed more than passing strange to him that he should find time to take all these circumstances into consideration at such a time; for he was fighting, he knew, for existence, his every muscle, nerve, and sinew concentrated upon the task of breaking the Armenian's clutch upon his gullet. And he had awakened, choking for breath.

His antagonist stood over him, gripping him with fingers as hard and cold as steel. His face, within two inches of Ruthven's, was grim and savagely determined. Ruthven, with hands hampered by heavy, fleece-lined gloves, tore fruitlessly at those wrists of iron. The thought of the revolvers resting ready in his pockets was in his mind, but first he must have air, breath; without that he might not live, or, indeed, much longer struggle.

Plainly, he felt his strength ebbing. There came a ringing in his temples, a booming as of some monstrous drum in his ears. The pain of his starting eyeballs grew all but intolerable, and he was going slack and giddy. It was near the end, he knew, and there was in him a sickening subconsciousness of the precipice and the dead fall from the flying carriage to unknown, unguessed depths.

Gradually, his struggles weakened. Blinded and suffocating, he lay, flaccid and inert, in the assassin's hands. His head went back upon his shoulders, and he stared into a sky of pitless blue, wherein a dozen suns revolved in blazing arcs. Yet he clung to life, desired

life in every fibre of his being, powerless as he was.

The Armenian, seeing the pass to which he had brought his victim, grunted malign satisfaction, and one hand relaxed its grip on Ruthven's throat, while with the other he fumbled at the handle to the door. It stuck, evidently; somehow he could not contrive to turn it. He gave one glance at the fainting, gasping man, and took away the other hand.

The air came into Ruthven's lungs like wine as the door swung wide, banging to and fro with the motion of the carriage. He realized vaguely what was happening, and—he could never have told how—summoned his dying strength to one final struggle.

In the mêlée, his rugs had been displaced; his legs were free. He kicked out madly and aimlessly. The heavy boot caught the Armenian on the pit of his stomach. He screamed and doubled up like a jackknife, yet instantaneously gathered himself together and again fell upon the American. But the blow had weakened him sensibly; the face above Ruthven's had gone a greenish white, and was beaded with cold sweat.

The knowledge that he had hurt his opponent nerved the American. He found an unsuspected store of strength and resolution, and fought the Armenian like a wild cat. His inferior in stature and weight, he kept the man at bay for a brief time, actually fought him off.

And, then, abruptly, he was on his feet, at hand grips with his foe, arms and legs apparently inextricably interentangled with the Armenian's. Thus, for a space, they swayed to and fro, panting between clinched teeth, each throwing every ounce of will and strength into the attempt to overcome his antagonist.

In the end, Ruthven managed to break the other's hold. He stepped back swiftly the six inches or so that lay between him and the inside door of the carriage, and, by a blessed miracle, extricated a revolver from his pocket.

He leveled it. The Armenian lurched backward a pace before the grim menace of that black muzzle, and —was gone.

The man had stepped through the open door. Ruthven cried aloud with horror, catching a fugitive glimpse of that swart, bearded face, frozen into a mask of terror, of long brown fingers, clutching wildly at space, and then—of nothing save the half mile of air that was between the cliff and the beetling walls of the farther hill.

Exhausted, trembling in every limb, faint with the horror of it, Ruthven fell back upon the rear seat. The revolver dropped from his nerveless fingers. He covered his face with his hands.

The carriage dashed on with unabated speed—the driver on the forward seat, whether or not aware of the termination of the tragedy, plying a merciless whip. Presumably, he took it for granted that the Armenian had triumphed, that it was Ruthven who had gone whirling into the abyss.

Possibly he gave it no thought one way or the other. His actions seem to bear out Ruthven's subsequent theory that the man was mad, either with drink or excitement. When the American had partially recovered, the driver was half standing, half sitting, upon the box, shaking the loose reins over the necks of the horses and shrieking at them with a piercing note, inhuman and terrible, in his voice.

Suddenly, awakened to a realization of the fact that this could not go on long without disaster, Ruthven picked up the revolver, that had fallen upon the cushions by his side. For a breath, he covered the man's head and his finger touched the trigger. Then, comprehending that to shoot him was the surest way to send them all to eternity, he gripped his self-control and thrust the weapon mechanically back into his pocket.

But he must be stopped, at all hazards, at whatever course. Even now, as Ruthven scrambled to his feet, and stood swaying, with legs well straddled, he saw that the open door flapped above a sheer drop of incalculable depths.

His brain, working madly, he

weighed for an instant the chances of his being able to climb upon the forward seat and overpower the man, without simultaneously dashing the carriage to destruction.

But only for an instant; he had no time to make mistakes, and he knew at once that the odds were a thousand to one against the success of such an undertaking. There was always the possibility that the driver's skill was greater than his discretion, that he might, by some almost preternatural accident, escape annihilating himself, with the carriage, its horses, and passenger. But Ruthven dared not risk it.

Even in that extremity he found time to think that Tynan was at Baku, in peril of his life, that only the arrival of Ruthven by his side would serve to warn, perhaps to save, him. He must live to see his journey's end, if only for friendship's sake. He turned and fought with the handle of the inside door.

The diligence was traveling on the very lip of the cliff, with a clear six feet of roadway between it and the rocky inner wall. That door once open, Ruthven could leap, with the certain assurance that, even if he stunned or killed himself in falling, he would at least fall upon honest and unyielding stone.

Presently, the inside door, like its fellow, was swinging wide. Ruthven gathered the skirts of his greatcoat about him for the leap.

At that instant, the outer horse missed its footing, pawed empty air, and fell, a dead weight, upon its mate. The latter, screaming with fear, braced itself, hoofs on the very edge of nothing, for the briefest thought. Then the heavy vehicle piled down upon and forced it over. The driver toppled on his perch, flung out wild arms, and hurtled outward. Ruthven leaped.

The verge of the cliff seemed to rise up to meet him. He struck it with frightful force. The breath was driven from him like wind from a punctured tire. But, even so, his fingers settling in crevices of the solid rock, tenacious as steel claws, held him when the weight of his body and legs, hanging over a thousand feet of air, would have dragged him down.

For a moment, he kicked frantically; then the toe of one boot caught upon a projecting ledge. Blindly, Ruthven trusted his life to its stability, heaved with all his might, and drew himself up.

As soon as he could muster the strength, he crawled feebly over to the very corner where the rock wall came down to the road, and there lay, panting and desperately sick, a puny, blown, and battered thing in the sunlight's white glare.

CHAPTER III.

THE REGION OF ETERNAL FIRE.

"Cossacks," said Ruthven, "a regiment of them—as well, as I could make out, returning from service on the Armenian frontier. I suppose I had lain there upward of an hour, and was beginning to think that I'd better get up and hike on to the next station, when they came clattering round a shoulder of the road.

"I told them as much of the story as I cared to—the horses had run away; my friend, the Armenian, or whatever he was, had jumped and missed, a way back, but I had waited until the last minute before jumping, and then got off scot-free, by the skin of my teeth. I could see they didn't believe me, but my passports were O. K., and then one of the Cossacks lay down and squirmed on his belly until his head was over the edge of the cliff, and what he saw below apparently justified me.

"So they sent me on to the next station with an escort, and I got another cart and came hammering down, hell-bent-for-election, to Tiflis; and so here."

He paused, and moistened his lips with the brandy and soda his host had given him; the speech was longer than he was accustomed to make. Nevertheless, "It was a tight squeeze," he

added reflectively, "and gives me food for thought."

"Right," said the American consul. "What motive do you think the fellow had? Robbery?"

"Hardly. I don't know. I remember that he was tearing up a telegraph form when he came back to my carriage, at Beslan, though I thought nothing of it at the time. Presumably, it was then and there that he received his instructions, for I swear he didn't give me three looks all the way from Rostov to Beslan."

"But, presuming that you were named in the wire," objected the consul, knitting his brows, "how could he be sure you were the right man?"

"For one thing, I believe I was the only passenger on the train that looked either American or English. And, then, my name is on my kit box—or was," Ruthven added ruefully; "it's at the bottom of that precipice now. Fortunately, I had all my papers, my guns, and my money on my person. I dare say I can scrape a sort of a wardrobe together, with the combined resources of Baku."

"Mine's at your service," volunteered the consul. "But why should any one wish to put you out of the way?" he persisted.

"War correspondent," replied Ruthven tersely. He had his own opinion, but did not then choose to air it. "The mortality among my kind has been rather over par in this section of the country, since February, if you come to think of it."

"But, why?" demanded the consul again. "You're right, I know. But, why?"

Ruthven sucked at his pipe, studying the floor at his feet intently. "Has it ever occurred to you," he asked presently, "to wonder what is the cause of this Kilkenny-cat business, between the Tatars and Armenians here?"

"Race antipathy, of course."

"Um-m. Natural view to take of it, but—pardon me—superficial. My own view is that there's something deeper, something rather more devilish, behind it all."

The consul stared at his visitor, his frank young face blank with wonder. "I don't understand. What do you mean?"

"Try to think whom it would profit," suggested Ruthven pleasantly—"this wholesale devastation of the fields, the utter cessation of business on the isthmus?"

The consul thought, but vainly. He shook his head, laughing uneasily. "You've got me," he confessed. "Perhaps you see more clearly——"

"Perhaps not," Ruthven cut in; "but I think I do. To every man his own viewpoint, you know. If I'm right—well, the exposé won't be anything to make you and me proud of our nationality."

Again the consul was mystified. "No, I don't follow."

"And I," said Ruthven, "will be sure I'm right before I speak. Possibly I shan't speak then, for it would be distinctly against the interests of the—well, the power I have in mind, to have any newspaper man cable proofs to any American or English paper. That is why, I hold, we are marked men in Baku to-day. I have taken the trouble to look in the matter, and it's a singular fact, and a fact against your theory that the Armenians are the aggressors in this race war, that nearly every correspondent shot here has apparently gotten his by means of a Tatar bullet. Think that over." Ruthven arose and picked up his hat. "It's no use lingering," he said, "with the work I've got to do. I won't trouble you any longer. Thank you for a drink and a talk with a white man. If you hear anything of Tynan, you'll let me know, of course."

"Certainly," agreed the consul. "I wish you wouldn't hurry." A crackling fusillade of rifles in the distance interrupted him. He listened, with his head to one side. "At it again," he commented, as the din continued. "Fortunately, it doesn't sound as if it was in your way. You're in no danger, of course, so long as they see you're English."

"Or American," supplied Ruthven.

"I wish I was so sure of that. But I don't believe they've got my measure yet. I'm probably safe enough in daylight, save for stray bullets; which are things I've been dodging ever since I can remember." He laughed lightly.

"Wait a minute," requested the consul, as his visitor moved toward the door. "Let me think if there's anything I can do to help you. How long is it since Tynan disappeared?"

"He hasn't been seen at his hotel since the first—yesterday, I believe."

"Yes," said the consul thoughtfully, "this is September second, the Bloody Second," with a forced laugh. "The peninsula will run blood before they've settled this difference, whatever its cause. You mark my words. I've been here long enough to know. Whatever the cause, the antipathy between Tatar and Armenian is too deep-seated to be forgotten in a day, especially after what happened this morning. You've heard about——"

"Nothing definite. I only know that there was some fighting just before my train got in." Seeing that his host was about to give him well-founded information, Ruthven resumed his seat, with a murmured apology for taking up so much time—a suggestion which his countryman repudiated with some heat.

"It's my business to serve you," he said. "Sit down, and help yourself to another drink.

"Of course," he resumed, after a moment's thought, "it really started in February, with the Adamoff murder. But, after those three days, the peninsula calmed down, and things went on as usual, for a time. It was only the time-honored calm before the real storm, I'm afraid. Every one in the know has understood, even the Russian authorities, that both sides, Tatars and Armenians, have been secretly arming all summer. On August twentieth, about two weeks ago, came the first flash in the pan, when several Armenians were shot to death, and their houses burned and sacked in the Tatar quarter. But that was only a ripple.

"This morning—you can't say which side fired the first shot or shots—the Armenians began to shoot down Tatar tram drivers in Petrovsk Square. The Tatars retaliated by forming armed bands, which have been traveling about the city all day, setting fire to Armenian residences whenever they got a chance, principally in the Tchemberkent quarter. I've just had a telephone message from a chap employed out Kishli way, and he says that the Tatar pipe-line thieves and bandits, who make up the major part of Kishli's population, are moving in hordes down toward the city. There'll be fun when they get here. It's only the beginning.

"Kishli, by the way, is a filthy hole, a hotbed of crime. It's a village on the road out to Balakhani. If you've any occasion to go out that way, Mr. Ruthven, you'd do well to make a detour round Kishli."

"Thank you. I'll bear that in mind," said Ruthven abstractedly. "Balakhani's one of the oil fields, isn't it? I ask because they tell me Tynan said something about going out to one of the fields to take some snapshots. He had his camera with him when he left the hotel."

"Well, I hope he didn't stop in Kishli, that's all. Look here, old chap, I don't want to interfere with your affairs, and I know just how anxious you are for your friend; but after that experience on the Georgian Road, I'd be a little careful of my own skin, if I were you. Hadn't you better come with us?"

"Where?"

"The Anglo-Saxon colony has chartered the steamboat, *Paddy,*" said the consul, "and Urquhardt, the British consul, and I are going to take all our own people that want to come a safe distance out on the Caspian, if this doesn't die out to-night. And I don't think it will. Won't you come along?"

"Thank you, no," said Ruthven, with a grave smile. "I wouldn't be helping Tynan much if I did that, would I? No; I'll stay. My address is the Hotel Metropol, where any message you may be able to send about Tynan should

reach me. Good night, and good luck to you."

"One moment," said the consul. "I don't know why I didn't think of this before. There is one man in Baku probably better informed than any other as to this business. I'll give you a card to him—Nicholas Laleff is the name. He's a Georgian, a wealthy and distinguished citizen. I remember I gave Tynan an introduction to Laleff, and it's just possible that the old fellow may be able to put you on Tynan's track."

"Thank you very much. I'll go to see him, if Tynan isn't back to-night."

"Good-by," said the consul, shaking his hand warmly. "I wish I owned a friend such as Tynan has in you, Ruthven."

"Oh, thunder!" wailed Ruthven, intensely embarrassed. "What do you want me to do?"

He hurried away, fearful of further compliment, to the small, Tatar-driven phaeton which had brought him from his hotel to the consulate, and stood now in waiting.

The drive back to the hotel was accomplished without incident. Ruthven sat wrapped in thought, oblivious to his surroundings. For that matter, the twilight-shrouded streets through which the phaeton passed were quiet enough; indeed, they were almost deserted, the few pedestrians abroad scurrying smartly out of the vehicle's way, disappearing alertly into narrow side streets and byways where the shadows lay the thickest.

An intense and brooding silence possessed this busy city by the sea; the rattle of horses' hoofs sounded alarmingly loud. From the north alone came the dropping reports of rifles and revolvers, isolated and deadened, all but robbed of their significance, by the distance. To the west, here and there, a rosy glow colored the skies above burning houses.

Once the phaeton passed a patrol of Cossacks; tall, gaunt, and fierce-faced men, on their undersized, but wiry, ponies, clattering at a brisk trot northward from the Petrovsk Square.

Their air was business-like, martial, impressive. Cossacks of the Don they were. Ruthven had seen exhibits of their northern brothers' handiwork in the streets of St. Petersburg and Moscow on his journey south; and now he wondered how long the disorderly and disorganized mobs of the Caucasus would stand against their carbines and nagaikas—those terrible loaded whips he had watched them wield with such fearful effect on human flesh in Moscow's streets.

CHAPTER IV.

ONE DAY TOO LATE.

Ruthven dined alone. Tynan had not been heard from; his present whereabouts, like his movements from the moment that he had left the hotel the preceding morning, were wrapped in impenetrable mystery. The police, to whom Ruthven had applied for information, were either powerless or profoundly indifferent; at all events, they neither gave nor offered Ruthven aid in his quest.

For this he was prepared to make allowances. His arrival in Baku had been well timed, it seemed, from the news-gathering point of view. He had come to find the long-heralded rising of Tatar against Armenian in the bud; the bud that was to bloom, a fiery, blood-red rose, ere he saw the last of the city. It was not to be expected that, at a time so fraught with anxiety for the authorities, he would be able to secure attention from official quarters.

But he could have sworn with vexation when his thoughts harked back over the road he had come to Baku, and he remembered the hundred trifling setbacks and delays which had contributed to bring him upon the scene one day too late to save his friend. Had one of them miscarried or been surmountable, he had found Tynan in the flesh, alive and well. Now he had the scant satisfaction of occupying a room next that which was still warm from his friend's tenancy.

In particular he raged when he considered how ingenuously he had per-

mitted himself to fall into the wily Armenian's trap at Beslan—the railway junction for the branch to Vladikavkaz. Since arriving in Baku, he had learned that the train which he had abandoned at the Armenian's suggestion had gone on, uninterrupted, to its destination, arriving in Baku only twelve hours behind its schedule time. The Armenian had but lied, played upon Ruthven's foreign credulity to lure him to a spot where his murder could be consummated swiftly and silently, and forever concealed.

By why? To what end? What intelligence had dictated that telegram ordering his death, which Ruthven firmly believed the Armenian had received at Beslan?

Instinctively, as Ruthven sought the answer to this query, his memory revived the mental picture which he carried in the back of his mind, of a white-lipped man, an American like himself, faltering excitedly into a telephone transmitter: "Because I thought him the best man, of course!"

Wallis? Ruthven recoiled from the suggestion. Could he believe the man capable of such infamy? Could he believe him so thoroughly advised of the inevitable shaping of events in the Transcaucasia as to have been able deliberately to plan this crime, amounting as it did to cold-blooded murder? He had no great faith in Wallis, nor love for him. Newspaper men inevitably learn things about their fellow men which they dare not print, and would not if they dared; but he shrank from believing *this*.

Yet, he remembered, he had acted upon such a conviction from the very moment he learned that Wallis' engagement to Katherine Annerley was rumored in the English capital, and that it was the *Recorder* that had sent Tynan to Baku—the *Recorder*, an English newspaper, owned and controlled by Wallis, with his American-made dollars, published in the interests of an American enterprise.

And, if he were right, Ruthven now saw clearly what he had at the time suspected; that his visit to Nankivell had been ill-advised, his curt conversation per telephone with Wallis, egregious folly. If anything, he had by those two errors but hastened the action of the machinery which had been set in motion to crush and obliterate Gregory Tynan, and render him but a memory in the mind of the woman George Wallis desired to own as wife.

The turmoil of his thoughts and the ever-growing anxiety for Tynan drove him into a fit of profound abstraction illustrative of his character. For a full hour after his dinner, he did not move in his chair; he hardly winked; the cigar he had lighted smouldered between his fingers and went out.

Then, with a start, he came to himself. Somewhere a clock was chiming mellowly the hour of eight; the night without had gone quite black, save for the fitful illumination of the street lamps.

Ruthven walked to the window, and looked out for a moment; the street in front of the hotel was silent and uninhabited. In the north, the light of the burning buildings had, in places, waned, in others waxed; a warm land breeze brought to his ears a sinister murmur, as if the great, white city sat muttering to itself, voicing vague mental disquiet.

Abruptly, Ruthven decided upon his immediate course of action. He reached for his hat, stuffed a revolver into his pocket, left the room, and in the hotel office inquired for a phaeton to convey him to the residence of Laleff, the Georgian. After some minutes, he was informed that none was to be found; it was the general impression that the Tatars, in whose hands the phaeton business of Baku lies, had "laid off" for the night, in anticipation of further trouble with the Armenians.

Ruthven, however, would not wait until morning. He received explicit directions as to his way, and left the hotel. For some minutes, he walked rapidly up the first thoroughfare, inland from the water front; he had been directed to turn at a certain corner, but, in his total ignorance of the conforma-

tion of the city, managed to miss it altogether. Nevertheless, he determined to go on and trust to the chance of meeting some well-informed citizen who would set him right upon his path; again he was telling himself that he had no time to waste; he would see Laleff that night, or not at all.

Having gathered that the Georgian's residence was in the neighborhood of the railway terminal, a quarter notable for its fine and imposing homes, he turned his footsteps in that direction, to the best of his rather imperfect memory.

A brief ways in from the level ground along the bay shore, Baku becomes a city of many tumbled hills, of rudely paved, tortuous streets and alleys, of low two and three-storied wooden houses, with flat Oriental roofs —a remnant of the Baku of the last century's early days, now given over to the abodes of the poorer working classes.

Into this obscure and dangerous locality, Ruthven penetrated rapidly, walking with quick, impatient strides, meeting no one whom he could manage to detain long enough to question; those infrequent figures he discerned at the junction of the streets ahead of him, vanished at the sound of his heels upon the cobbles; those fewer still that passed him, flitted swiftly by, with bended heads and averted faces, keeping as far from him as the limits of the streets allowed.

And, once, when he swerved toward a wayfarer of more assured bearing, addressing him in Russian, the man backed abruptly to a blank house wall, and, without other reply, raised a hand wherein something shone darkly, like the blued steel barrel of a revolver. Whereupon, Ruthven, having gained wisdom, gave over his purpose and, with his own hand on the butt of his weapon, contented himself with watching the fellow until he had sidled away to a corner and leaped around it.

Then he went on, now more slowly and something repentant of the hastiness of his course, yet confident of its ultimate outcome. He could not go far, he reasoned, without encountering a patrol of Cossacks, from whom most certainly he could obtain definite directions, if not a personal escort.

Presently, he came to a halt, for breath, on a hilltop, the summit of an eminence, high out of the ordinary, overlooking its fellows. Pausing, he gazed back and around him, realizing that he had definitely lost his way, and that, to get his bearings again, he must strike back to the water front.

Below him, the Caspian spread its bed of blackness, sprinkled with innumerable points of light. Its land limits were sharply indicated by the rows of frosty arcs along the esplanade, in the public squares, and on the quays and wharves of the manufacturing district.

To this the city sloped, a confusion of square, horizontal roofs. To the left, the refineries of Black Town were still, it seemed, in full blast, their towering chimneys belching mighty pillars of inky smoke, with bases tinted ruby by the furnace flames beneath. To the right, the hill fell away in graduated waves to the valley between Baku proper and the Tatar city, on Bailov promontory, to whose ridge, again, the lights climbed in glittering terraces.

A spectacle magnificent beyond the common, invested with a certain ominous beauty; Ruthven gazed upon it, fascinated by its sheer beauty, for the nonce forgetful of his errand.

But the quietness of it all was like a voiceless threat; and its shattering brought him back to earth and the knowledge of his duty.

A sudden burst of yells and rattle of shots took his attention toward Government Street, over which a dull, blood-red glow was forming; and, as he looked, flames licked lurid above the housetops from one end of that thoroughfare to the other. The crackle of the conflagration rose loud, vying with an increasing racket of rifles and hand arms which seemed to spring to life simultaneously in all quarters of the city. The din grew all but deafening, a medley mad enough to strike terror to the stoutest heart.

Ruthven, to do him justice, remained

unterrified; but he grew uncommonly perturbed. The disorder, as nearly as he could estimate, had burst out in a dozen districts of the town at once, and was spreading from street to street; already he judged it to have cut him off from the hotel and the European quarter. And he had his life to think of, not so much for its value to himself, as to Gregory Tynan; he had to rescue Tynan living, to avenge Tynan dead.

He faced about, inland, and took some half-dozen hesitating steps, for once in his life undecided. Behind him arose a sound of many feet and the shrill yapping of a mob in being; he had that to evade.

And yet, before he realized it, the rabble had swept from a side street into the thoroughfare, and was bearing down upon him; a confused mass of men, wildly pelting northward. He caught a single coherent yell out of an insane chorus—"To Shemkhinka!" —ere he was engulfed, in a measure carried off his feet, and made a component part of this wild Asiatic stampede.

Nor did it need a second glance at the men who hemmed him in on either side to assure him that the worst had befallen him; that he had blundered into the very arms of those whom he had most to fear, if he read aright the riddle of Baku—the Tatars.

The second and concluding part of this story will be published two weeks later, in the first February issue; on sale January 10th.

THE BIRD SURGEONS

THERE are not a few birds that possess a knowledge of the principles of surgery that is almost supernatural. The woodcock, the partridge, and some other birds are able to dress their wounds with considerable skill. A naturalist says that on several occasions he has killed woodcock that were, when shot, convalescing from wounds previously received. In every instance he found the old injury neatly dressed with down plucked from the stem of feathers and skillfully arranged over the wound, evidently by the long beak of the bird

In some instances a solid plaster was thus formed, and in others ligatures had been applied to wounded or broken limbs.

One day he killed a bird that evidently had been severely wounded at some recent period. The wound was covered by a sort of network of feathers which had been plucked by the bird from its own body and so arranged as to form a plaster completely covering and protecting the wounded surface. It had evidently acted as hæmostatic in the first place, and subsequently as a shield covering the wound. The feathers were fairly netted together, passing alternately under and above each other and forming a textile fabric of great protective power.

Birds whose limbs have been broken by shot are often found with the fractured ends neatly joined and ligated. The French naturalist, Dumonteil, tells of a woodcock that had been shot by a sportsman on the afternoon of a certain day. After a long search the bird was given up, but it was discovered the next morning by an accident. In the meantime, the wounded legs were found to be neatly ligated, an exquisitely neat bandage having been placed round each limb. The poor bird, however, had, in dressing its wound, entangled its beak with some long, soft feathers; and had it not been discovered it would have died of starvation.

The False Alarm

By A. M. Chisholm

Author of "The Tear-Up," "McTavish's Guests," Etc.

You will make the acquaintance of some remarkable people here. One of them is an unusually pretty girl who announces herself as a notorious figure in the higher circles of graft. Incidentally it illustrates "what fools we mortals be" when there's a woman in the case. There is a certain charm about the story, as well as the girl.

AFTER consuming one cigar, with his left ankle crossed over his right, which, in turn, rested on the veranda railing, Big Jim McDonough crossed his right over his left by way of change and lit a fresh smoke. An engaged couple, rounding the corner in search of seclusion, hesitated, looked at him indignantly, and withdrew. The big man chuckled softly as one who enjoys a quiet joke. For half an hour or more, he had been quite aware that he was occupying a favorite sitting-out spot; but he was also quite comfortable, and he would not have moved for all the lovers since Antony and Cleopatra.

The week-end hop at the Lakeview House was in full swing. In the ballroom, although the French windows were thrown wide, the temperature reached the nineties. A perspiring orchestra ground out harmony and softly cursed the heat of America in mellow Italian. Warmly moist couples circled the room languidly, but the long, dimly lighted veranda and the pine-shadowed path to the lake had the preference.

McDonough dozed over his cigar. The music filtered to him in soft waves of sound thrown back by the tree tops. It was very pleasant, very peaceful, very restful. A light footstep and the rustle of skirts behind him failed to attract his attention.

"Mr. McDonough!" said a soft, musical contralto.

Big Jim did not turn his head. Not the slightest motion betrayed the fact that he had had the doubtful pleasure of hearing himself addressed by name. He removed the long black panatela from beneath his white mustache, knocked off the ash, and resumed his smoke.

"Mr. McDonough!" the contralto repeated, this time with a shade of amused insistence.

Big Jim glanced to his right and saw an empty chair; glanced to the left and saw another. Then he rose slowly, ponderously, as became an elderly gentleman naturally and healthily tired from a day's fishing, and faced the speaker. He bowed.

"Pardon me, madam. Did you address me?"

The girl, slender, trim, clad in white from the tips of her satin-covered toes to the base of her perfectly rounded throat, laughed musically. Even in the shadows, Big Jim could see that she was pretty. Her dark eyes, full of mocking amusement, challenged him. Dusky hair, neither brown nor black, was drawn away smoothly from a low,

broad forehead and caught in a coil at the base of the shapely little head. A tendril, straying from the abundant mass, caressed a soft, tanned cheek, warm with the glow of perfect health. A small hand put the stray lock into place with one sure motion and a deft little pat.

"I had that honor, Mr. McDonough."

"No doubt the darkness is responsible for the mistake," said Big Jim courteously. "My name is Robinson, madam."

"So the hotel register alleges," said the girl. "If you prefer it, of course ——" She shrugged her slight shoulders as one who concedes a doubtful right.

"My dear young lady, it is not a question of preference at all," said Big Jim. "That is my name; I really cannot help it."

The girl laughed throatily, musically. "May I sit down? I will undertake to convince Mr. Robinson, of Pittsburg, that he is really Big Jim McDonough, of Chicago, as much as any other place."

Big Jim drew a chair forward with a bow. He was quite sure he had never seen the girl before, and he was equally sure that she couldn't bluff him into an admission of identity. But what was her game? Just at that he was lying low, and recognition was unpleasant, even dangerous. The girl might be a reporter on some enterprising paper; she might even be in the employ of a detective agency, although that was unlikely. She was young and presumably foolish; and the veteran con man smiled sardonically to himself at the idea of a contest of wits with her.

The girl sat down, throwing a filmy scarf about her shoulders against a cooler breath of air from the lake. She leaned back and surveyed the big, benevolent-looking man by her side with frank curiosity. "Now, if you'll light your cigar and be comfortable, we'll talk," said she. She watched McDonough touch fire to a fresh smoke. "In the first place, I suppose you wonder how I knew you?"

"Let us say I wonder why you think you know me," said Big Jim.

"I've seen you twice," the girl began. "Once at the track in New Orleans, and once in a bank in Seattle. Which puts me in mind that I owe you an apology. When I first saw you I took you for a good thing."

"A—good—thing!" said Big Jim, not at all flattered. He eyed her with increased interest. "I'm afraid I scarcely follow you, young lady."

"Nonsense!" said the girl crisply. "You understand perfectly. It was your own fault, for you dress and act the part. I thought you looked like money. I took you for a sporty banker or a broker—a nice old fall guy for about any game. You looked very good to me, and I nearly went to you. To think of it! To think of my sizing up Big Jim McDonough, the topside con man, for a sucker!"

Big Jim smiled grimly. That very mistake had been made several times, and in each case the person in error had lost money and gained experience. The girl's lapse into the cant phrases of the profession was reassuring.

"Still, we don't get any nearer to it," he said. "What makes you think that I am McDonough?"

"I lost track of you in New Orleans," the girl replied. "But when I saw you in Seattle you were with 'Pony' DeVeber. I thought he had you, and I wasn't butting in. I asked him who you were."

DeVeber was one of the nerviest gamblers on the Pacific Coast. McDonough knew him very well. It looked all right.

"And who are you?" he asked bluntly.

"I am Kitty Lachance," the girl answered.

"The deuce you are!" exclaimed McDonough.

He was greatly surprised. For in the higher circles of the world of graft the name was well known, although few were acquainted with its owner. As a rule, she worked without confederates, and seldom flew at small game. Nobody was in her confidence. No-

body knew where she came from, where she lived, or how. She played for her own hand, and a score of exploits attested her cold-blooded nerve. For a moment, Big Jim was skeptical. It appeared incredible that this slight, pretty, entirely ladylike young girl was Kitty Lachance.

"You'll pardon me, I hope," said he; "but I find it difficult to believe you."

"And why?"

"Why—because——" Big Jim found himself actually stammering before her cool eyes; but he was still wary. "Oh, I suppose for the same reason that you were deceived in Mr. McDonough. You don't look the part."

"Don't I?" The girl tapped the floor with a light foot, and looked down. "You don't advertise your own business, you know. Did you have a mental picture of a stage adventuress?"

"No," said the big man; "but you look so—so—why, hang it, you're a little girl. You might be fresh from a convent school. Do you mean to tell me that you're the woman who put the 'jockey brother' game across for ten thousand on old Gaetz, of Blairton?"

"I didn't tell you so, but I did it," the girl replied. "It wasn't hard."

"Wasn't, eh?" snorted McDonough. "Young lady, I've tried to separate him from some coin myself, and all I got was a quick getaway—and I was in luck, at that."

"So you are Big Jim McDonough, after all!" she laughed.

For a moment, the veteran was taken aback; then he joined in the laugh. "Yes, I am; I own up. Now, if you are a lady reporter, you are welcome to interview me."

"I do want an interview; but not that kind," said the girl earnestly. "I really am Kitty Lachance, and I came here on purpose to see you."

"Miss Lachance, if I were thirty years younger, I'd say something appropriate," said McDonough; "but, as I'm probably older than your father, I won't attempt it."

"That's nice of you," said Kitty Lachance. "If you were a younger man, I wouldn't be here at all—you understand?"

McDonough nodded comprehension, and began to like her. She was very pretty, as neat and bright as a new pin, and evidently as smart as a steel trap. "All right, Miss Lachance," said he. "We'll get on very well."

"Of course we shall," she agreed. On her part, she liked this big, courteous old swindler who understood so readily. "Mr. McDonough, I came to talk business."

"Yes?" said Big Jim questioningly. "By the way, how did you find me? I'm supposed to be in retreat."

"I got your address from Charlie Smith."

"Does Charlie know you?" asked McDonough in surprise. "He never told me."

"I made his acquaintance for that express purpose," she replied. "I have to take in a partner, this time; and he must be a man of about your age. I don't know of any one else I'd trust. No, you needn't acknowledge the compliment. We're both wolves, aren't we? But I'm told you are as straight as a stretched string with your friends, and I want you to believe that I am, too."

"I'll believe it till I find out different—and I'll bet I never do," said the big man. "You want me to go into something with you, then? How much of a winning is there to it?"

"It's hard to say. I'm almost sure it will run over thirty thousand. Maybe to fifty."

McDonough whistled. "That's skyward, young lady. How many split it?"

Kitty Lachance hesitated. "You see, this is my frame-up. I'm out for the big money, myself; an even division won't suit me."

"That's fair enough," said McDonough. "Only, of course, when you come to me for help you tip your hand."

"I know," she admitted. "You and I might possibly work it alone. Possibly, I say. But for a sure thing we ought to have two more. Now, your

side partners, Smith and Duprau, will come in. With four in it, I want forty per cent. of the winnings, and you may split the sixty as you choose."

Big Jim made a mental calculation. "On a thirty-thousand-and-upward basis, that's good enough," he said. "You are entitled to the big end, of course. All right. I agree to that. And now, Miss Lachance, suppose you tell me where the plum tree grows."

The girl leaned forward, and sank her voice to a whisper inaudible six feet away. The big man listened with keen attention, occasionally interjecting a question. When she had ended, he chuckled.

"It looks all right to me," he said. "I'll wire the boys to meet us. It strikes me, Miss Lachance, that we have both been losing money all the time we haven't known each other."

II.

Ludwig Roth, a cigarette between his rather full, sensual lips, and an anteprandial cocktail concealed from the public gaze, stood in a Montreal hotel where he could command full view of the procession to the dining room.

As he posed in an attitude of studied carelessness, he was very good-looking, indeed; a fact of which he occasionally reminded himself by a side glance at a wall mirror. A physiognomist might have objected that his eyes were set a trifle too close together, his chin too long and pointed, and his ears practically lobeless. But these defects, if defects they were, were offset by his lithe, athletic figure accentuated by an excellent tailor, graceful carriage, and regular, clear-cut features. He lacked very little of being handsome, and he was perfectly aware of it. Women, as a rule, looked twice at him.

A very pretty young girl, on her way to the dining room with a large, elderly, important gentleman, presumably her father, was no exception to the rule. Her dark eyes, gentle and timid, rested on Ludwig Roth, turned aside, and came back in a second glance. Meeting his rather bold gaze, they dropped in confusion, and a faint color swept over her soft cheeks. She moved closer to her escort, slid her arm inside his, as if for protection, and passed on.

Roth smiled to himself, and brushed an ash from his lapel. Undoubtedly he had made an impression. The little girl was a peach, too. Probably just out of school and on a holiday trip with "poppa." Obeying a sudden impulse, he dropped his cigarette, and entered the dining room in her wake. But fortune—in this case personified by a wooden-faced and obstinate head waiter—was unkind to him. In spite of a monetary consideration, accepted and treacherously disregarded, he was shown to a seat several tables removed from the dark-eyed little beauty; and, although he kept a careful watch, he could detect no sign that she was aware of his existence.

At last, the elderly gentleman pushed back his chair; they rose, and, as the girl passed by, she bestowed on Roth one fleeting glance, half timid and half challenging.

He smiled complacently again. "Wants to flirt, and doesn't know how," he said to himself. His gaze, which had followed the girl, came back and encountered that of a man at the next table. The stranger's eyes shifted instantly—too instantly. That very fact and the hint of amused recognition in them, roused Roth's suspicions. Sipping his coffee, he inspected the other furtively.

The stranger was in the middle thirties, fair, of medium height, well dressed. There was nothing distinctive about him—nothing to catch or hold either eye or memory. He looked like a very ordinary business man. He was quite unknown to Roth; but the latter's suddenly aroused distrust was by no means allayed.

Finishing his coffee, he strolled out, bought a cigar and a newspaper, and seated himself in the rotunda. In a few minutes the stranger appeared. He also bought a cigar, and seated himself in a distant corner. Apparently, he did not notice Roth at all.

Roth was somewhat relieved. After all, that single, intercepted glance might have been purely casual. He hoped so; he had very good reasons for disliking keen-eyed strangers; and he dismissed the occurrence temporarily from his mind.

His thoughts reverted to the girl. She certainly was a little peach, and apparently not averse to a flirtation. If he could only get acquainted! It would be a rather pleasant amusement for a couple of days, which was the time limit he had set on his stay in Montreal. He was no novice in such matters, and he did not lack effrontery; also, when he chose, he had very good manners. Obviously the first step was to ascertain her identity. With that end in view, he rose and sauntered toward the desk.

He bent over the hotel register, and ran his eye down the list of names. It was merely a preliminary to a confidential request for information. But here luck favored him.

"Have you a telegram for me?" asked an authoritative voice behind him.

Roth half turned to look at the speaker. It was the girl's elderly companion.

"Name, please," said the hotel clerk, with weary politeness.

The newcomer laughed. "I'm used to living in a town where everybody knows me. My name is Randolph—Judge Randolph."

Roth scanned the register. There it was. "Fairfax Lee Randolph, Roanoke, Va.; Miss Edith Randolph."

No, there was no telegram for Judge Randolph. If one came, it would be called or sent up to his rooms.

"By the way," said the judge, "there is a place a few hours' run from here—Lake Placid, isn't it? What is it like? Any fishing? And how about accommodations?"

Yes, Lake Placid was a summer resort. The fishing was said to be good, and there was good accommodation. More the clerk did not know.

"I beg your pardon," said Roth, seizing his opportunity. "I know Lake Placid very well. There is excellent fishing, boating, and golf. The Chateau Montcalm is a first-class house."

"Ah! thanks," said the judge. "You've been there, I presume?"

"Several times," Roth replied. "In fact," he added mendaciously, "I am at present trying to arrange my business so that I may spend a few days there. The fishing is splendid." The last remark was a cunning stroke, he thought.

The judge rose to the bait.

"Is, eh?" he said eagerly. "If you haven't anything to do for half an hour, suppose you tell me about it over a cigar, Mr.—er——"

"Roth—Ludwig Roth," supplied that individual, grinning to himself.

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Roth. My name is Randolph."

"Judge Randolph, isn't it?" said Roth cunningly. "Your name is quite familiar to me, sir."

The judge beamed. Evidently, he was not averse to a little flattery. "Right, sir," he admitted. "Come along!"

Roth turned from the desk to accompany him—and bumped full into the stranger who had bestowed upon him that keen, measuring glance at the dinner table. Both recoiled. The latter apologized. Roth eyed him with renewed suspicion. He was morally certain that the man had been listening to his conversation with Randolph. It showed a degree of curiosity which made him uneasy. However, there was nothing on which to hang an accusation. He growled a surly acknowledgment, and followed the judge.

Since proficiency in the art piscatorial was not among Mr. Roth's varied accomplishments, he was hard put to it to maintain his end of the conversation; for Judge Randolph proved to be an enthusiastic Waltonite, and from his lips the technology of the craft flowed in a bewildering stream. Roth found himself hooked, meshed, and entangled in a medley of spinners, red hackles, silver coachmen, split bamboos, gaffs, and landing nets. To him, a rod was a fishpole, bait meant a

worm, and when he fished at all he used a float. Therefore, much of the judge's talk got past him. He did the best he could, but he was hopelessly outclassed; and, when he finally managed to switch the conversation away from fish, he was very glad, indeed.

Judge Randolph announced his intention of visiting Lake Placid. "I'll go to-morrow, if I can persuade my daughter," said he.

Roth wondered if, after all, he could not spare time for Placid himself. There were people in New York who expected him—who, in fact, awaited his coming rather anxiously. He had intended to spend only a couple of days in Montreal, leaving on the first opportune occasion; for his business was one of delicacy and required, above all, secrecy. But the lure of dark eyes was before him. In all his life, he had never failed to respond to a suggestion of feminine interest coupled with undoubted beauty. And then—and this caused him considerable disquiet—there was a stranger apparently spying on his movements.

"If you can arrange your business to spend a few days at Placid, I should like it very much," Judge Randolph was saying.

"I'd like it, myself," said Roth. "I'll see; I may be able to manage it."

"Let me know in the morning." The judge rose. "Time for me to go to bed, Mr. Roth. When I was your age, I'd see the sun rise—maybe. Now"—he sighed—"well, some day you'll be taking care of what you have left, too. Good night."

Left alone, Roth returned to the rotunda. Apparently engrossed in a newspaper, the stranger sat where he could command a full view of the smoking-room door. Roth passed him twice without eliciting a sign of interest, but he had no doubt that his every movement was watched. He resolved to put the matter to a test.

He left the hotel, walked two blocks briskly, turned down a quiet street, rounded another corner, and waited. Almost immediately, he heard quick footsteps. He stepped suddenly forward, and came face to face with his man.

"Well?" he said sharply. The other would have passed. Roth barred his way. "I want to know what you mean by following me?" he demanded.

"Following you? Nonsense!" said the man calmly.

"What do you want?" Roth insisted.

"I don't want anything," said the other. "You must be drunk, or else this is a hold-up."

"Look here, my friend," Roth blustered, "if I see you again, I'll hand you over to the police."

The stranger simply laughed.

"I mean it," said Roth angrily.

"All right; we'll say you do. If you like, I'll go to headquarters with you, now. I can stand it, if you can." His mocking smile was a taunt and a challenge.

Roth possessed a violent and ill-governed temper, and physical cowardice did not enter into his make-up. Also, he was a dangerous fighter. "When you see a mix comin', get up close, hit first, and make one punch do," an old rough-house artist had advised him. At the stranger's smile, his anger suddenly flared up, as fire breaking through light straw. He struck without warning, swiftly, viciously, as a snake strikes, with thrust of shoulder and weight of body behind the blow; and, as he struck, he grunted like a wild beast, for every ounce of his splendid strength was bunched and concentrated in the effort.

Too quick for guard or sidestep, the hammer-like fist smashed fair and true on the point of the chin. The stranger swayed, stiffened, toppled, and crashed backward at full length, like a falling tree. His head cracked against the pavement, and he lay without motion.

Instantly Roth was upon him. His fingers ran skillfully over the cranium, for he feared a fracture, and he had not intended to inflict serious injury. Reassured by touch and by the note of the other's breathing, he searched pocket after pocket. Such papers as he found, he transferred to his own. He took nothing else. And then, leav-

ing the unconscious man lying where he had fallen, he returned to the hotel.

He locked the door of his room, and spread the papers on the table. They were few in number—a railway folder, a newspaper clipping of steamship dates, among which he recognized the name of the boat from which he had disembarked that morning, and a double page of foolscap covered with the figures of an intricate calculation which he could not follow.

There was no clue to the owner's identity, and he picked up the railway folder idly. From it fell a slip of typewritten paper. He pounced on it. This is what he read:

MEMO FOR THOMAS ROACH.

Roth will land from S. S. *Labrador,* due 12th inst. Keep him under closest observation from time he lands. If he attempts to communicate with New York or elsewhere, wire name of party at once. Detain and search him at the border if he tries to cross. Above all, do not arouse his suspicions. Case is most important. Walsh leaving to assist you. Officers already instructed.

There was no signature, but Roth stared at the neatly typed lines with a troubled face.

"So that's it!" he said, drawing a long breath. "All right. I might have bunted into this with my eyes shut. Now, where am I at? I can't go on to New York—it would be too risky—and I can't wire Krantz, either. I'd hate to write a letter." He swore softly, drumming his fingers nervously on the table. "I can't do a thing but wait. I wish I knew what Walsh looks like; but if he's as obvious as Roach, I'll find out soon enough." His brow cleared a little, and he laughed. "By thunder, I'll be able to go to Placid, after all."

III.

The man sat up in the darkness and, with tentative, uncertain fingers, touched his throbbing head. On it was a lump the size of a turkey's egg, which threatened to rival an ostrich's later on. His jaw muscles ached, and his upper incisors felt as if they had been loosened violently in their sockets. For that first sick moment, everything swam before his dazed eyes, and the buildings on either side of the street swayed and almost collapsed. He pressed his forehead down in the palm of his hands till the world steadied.

"Come back from Slumberland, Little Nemo!" he murmured. Then he swore as his senses cleared. "Roth got my goat for fair," he muttered. "Who would have thought it? The last thing I expected was to be punched out." He shook his head dolefully; the movement gave him pain, and he groaned.

A bulky form loomed in front of him.

"Now, then; now, then!" said a voice with a strong Milesian accent; "the streets is no rest house. Get up off iv thim! Fwat's the matter? Are yez drunk?" The portly policeman stooped with some difficulty, and caught him by the collar.

"Drunk nothing!" said the man. "Hold on, officer. Go easy. I slipped on an orange peel or something. Feel this lump!"

"It's th' divil iv a foine wan," the guardian of the peace admitted. He sniffed suspiciously; but could detect no odor of liquor. "Can yez walk? Or do I have to tur-rn in a call f'r th' ambylance?"

"Oh, I can walk." The man got to his feet slowly, and took a step. "Yes, I'm all right again. Look for that infernal bit of peel, will you? I was on my way to the hotel, and suddenly my heels went up, and I lit where the lump is now."

"Is yer watch and money on ye?" the policeman asked practically.

"Yes; all safe." He uttered an exclamation.

"Fwat's missin'?"

"Nothing. It's my head. Not missing. I wish it was. Oh, Lord!" He pressed his hands to it and groaned. And then he laughed, chuckling and shaking with mirth, as one on whom the humorous side of a situation, before unsuspected, suddenly dawns.

"Look, now," said the policeman suspiciously, "do yez feel quare at all?

Docther Dolan's office is jist beyant. Come along wid me, an'——"

The man recovered his gravity. "It's all right, old man. I'm not batty—straight, I'm not. And I'm much obliged for your help. Here, take hold. Just a little keepsake for your trouble."

A piece of paper crackled as it changed hands. P. C. Finucane, Number Forty-eight, resumed his beat with great dignity. A block away he halted and struck a match. "A foive-spot!" he ejaculated, in pleased surprise. "Praise God f'r oranges an' bananies, too! They do both be th' foine fruits!"

When the recipient of Roth's knockout blow reached the hotel, he entered warily, keeping a watchful eye for his late assailant. The latter was not in the rotunda, and he paused before a young, alert-looking gentleman, whose entire attention appeared to be concentrated upon a newspaper.

The lips of the newcomer moved almost imperceptibly.

"Where's Roth?"

"In his room; came in half an hour ago," said the other without changing his attitude. He, too, spoke with little or no lip movement. "Did he lose you?"

"There's no train before morning, so he's safe for the night, I guess," said the first, without answering the question. "Come to the smoking room. I want to tell you something."

The smoking room was deserted. The first man removed his hat, took the other's hand, and guided it to the lump on his cranium. "Feel that!" he said.

The other whistled. "What did you stop with it?" he asked.

"Everything stopped for about ten minutes, so far as I was concerned." He recounted events briefly. "And when he had punched me out," he concluded, "what do you think he did? He went through me."

The other laughed. "Good man; he's got nerve."

"Nerve? I should say so," growled the first. "He's got more than that, now."

"You weren't carrying much cash. If you were put away for ten minutes some one else may have gone through you, for all you know."

The remark elicited a grim chuckle. "I didn't lose a red cent of money. Would a dip have left me my watch and a tie-sparkle? Not hardly. He wasn't laying himself open to a charge of robbery. He was after information, and now he's got it."

"I don't see——" began the other; but the first man broke in impatiently:

"You don't? Why, Great Scott, man, he pinched my memo of instructions. He's in his room, now, reading them. What do you think of that?"

"What? You don't mean it?"

"Straight goods."

The other laughed until the tears stood in his eyes. "I've a head like a tack," he gasped between convulsions of mirth. "It was worth a stiff punch. You couldn't plant it that way again in a thousand years."

"It's the best bet you know that I don't want to." The speaker caressed his jaw tenderly. "What will he do?" he asked. "He may make a quick break; that's what I'm afraid of."

"We have to take that chance; but I don't believe he'll try it. He'll wait till he can frame up a good scheme that he thinks is dead safe. That's what I'd do if I were in his shoes. And, meantime, you can tie to his not overlooking the girl."

"He stared at her all through dinner," said the first, apparently reassured. "Yes, I guess it's all right. She certainly gave him the cuddlesome eye. He knows he's good-looking, and it tickled him all the way. Well, now he's wise that I'm Roach, it's exit right for mine. You go on, Mr. Nick Carter Walsh. I'm off to bed. My head aches like the devil. I'll leave you to take the good news to Ghent. And if I feel as bum in the morning as I do now, you won't see me till noon."

"And maybe not then," said the other. "I've got a hunch that the next act will be a pretty woodland scene. I make my entrance with the happy tourists."

IV.

The stream was very quiet. It was little more than a canoe length in width, and the birches and maples in summer foliage crowding down the banks were reflected, leaf and twig, with photographic distinctness on the still surface. Through the green of their leafage the sloping sun filtered in shafts of amber light, mottling the water in kaleidoscopic tints. Below the smooth water surface lay yellow sands, level in the current, ridge-sown in the shallows, and deeper, darker pools, where, with lazily sculling fins, fish moved slowly.

Roth knelt in the stern of the canoe and watched the girl. She leaned over the gunwale, looking down at the play of light and shadow. Her cheek rested on one round arm, bare to the elbow and healthily tanned; its fellow was thrown back carelessly. From where he knelt, merely a small, shapely ear and a part of the contour of her face were visible; but these and the mass of dark hair, worn girlishly low, fascinated him. He let the canoe drift, with but an occasional guiding paddle stroke, and contemplated his companion.

The girl raised her head, half turned, and leaned back upon the cushions. Her eyes were unseeing, dreamy, filled with shadows born, perhaps, of sun and sky and water—the eyes of a child whose daydreams are not yet of the past.

"How beautiful it all is—how very beautiful!" she murmured. The words were not for Roth. Rather, they were the faint, unconscious expression of a state of mind than of a concrete thought.

"Pretty little creek, isn't it?" he said. "I thought you'd like it."

The words jarred. Edith Randolph's eyes suddenly cleared of dreams. Instead of the child, looked from them for an instant the mind of a woman. And with another change they became those of a young girl, happy in the moment, carefree, innocent.

"It's a dear!" she exclaimed vivaciously. "Why didn't you tell me to bring my camera? I'd just love to take a picture."

"We'll come again," said Roth. To him the stream's main attraction was its seclusion. Few people took the long paddle necessary to visit it. "How would you like to see it by moonlight?"

"I'd like it very much," she replied. "Let's make up a party and come tomorrow night."

Roth frowned; he disliked the suggestion of company. "Too many people, talking, laughing, singing college songs, would spoil it," he objected. "Why can't we come alone?"

She considered, and shook her head. "You know I can't."

"Why not?" he persisted.

"Daddy wouldn't like it. And, besides," she added primly, as an afterthought, "of course I wouldn't, anyway."

Roth stabbed viciously with his paddle at a basking fish. The girl was elusive as the sun's rays on the water. He had known her for five days, of which he had deliberately wasted one in fishing with her father, Judge Randolph, and the remaining four had been spent in endeavoring to open a flirtation in ways which he had before proved uniformly successful.

Edith Randolph puzzled him. Evidently she was little more than a schoolgirl, and yet, to his intense surprise—for his vanity in such matters was his weak point—he could not see that he had made any progress. She would drive, fish, paddle, and dance with him; challenge him to boldness with her wonderful eyes, and then retreat skillfully, leaving him entangled and indignant.

"Mrs. Grundy is a nuisance," he said. "I suppose it wouldn't do. The ladies at the hotel are a gossipy lot."

"Old cats!" said the girl. "Did you ever want to do anything very much, not because you wanted to do it so much as because somebody didn't want you to do it, or would say mean things if you did?"

"If I get your meaning," said Roth,

with a laugh at her complexity of expression, "I've felt that way pretty often."

"Well, and did you do it?"

"Sometimes. I suppose that's 'cussedness,' and I've a lot of it in my disposition."

"Yes, I think you have," she announced thoughtfully.

"Thank you. May I return the compliment?"

She leaned her chin on her clasped hands, and regarded him with grave, childlike eyes.

"I didn't mean to be rude, please. You're different from the men down our way. You've traveled, and seen more, and you seem so sure of yourself. If you wanted to do something, and people tried to prevent you, you'd find a way, wouldn't you?"

"I'd try pretty hard, I think," said Roth. Her estimate flattered his vanity.

"I like you for that," she continued. "I like people who succeed in whatever they undertake. And, then, you treat me as if I were grown up. Daddy thinks I'm a baby, still. The darkies call me 'missy' and not 'ma'am,' as they should. I can't impress even the maids at the hotels and the porters on the trains." She pouted childishly for a moment, and then laughed. "You *don't* think I'm a baby, do you, Mr. Roth?"

"Certainly not," he replied manfully. "You've been grown up for a long time. But, all the same, I can see that you were a very pretty baby."

She ignored the concluding sentence. "I was a strange child. I sometimes think"—this with the mystery of extreme youth—"that I am a strange girl now; few people understand me."

Roth smiled in covert amusement. How very young she was, and how utterly inexperienced! The eternal conviction of youth that it is mysterious, uncommon, incomprehensible, differing materially in psychology and mentality from every other human being, amused him. Cynically, he remembered the budding years when he had held much the same opinion of himself. To a certain extent, it survived in him, although he was not aware of the fact. No one, he considered, retained fewer illusions.

"I would like to understand you," he said gravely, no trace of amusement in his voice.

"I don't understand myself," she announced, with great solemnity. "I believe I have it in me to be very wicked. Now you are laughing!"

"I wouldn't associate the idea of wickedness with you," said Roth. "What is the worst thing you have ever done?"

She pondered a black past. "I've done plenty of things that were wrong. I don't think I shall tell you. What have you done, yourself?"

"Nothing lately."

She regarded him thoughtfully. "I'll tell you something, though perhaps I shouldn't. I saw you yesterday talking to a man who wears a beard trimmed to a point."

"You mean Carter? Yes; what about him?"

"Is he a great friend of yours?"

"Merely an acquaintance of a few days' standing. Why?"

"This morning," said Miss Randolph, "I saw him coming out of your room. You were then away fishing with daddy."

"Out of my room!" Roth could not repress a start of surprise. "Are you sure? What time was that?"

"Of course I'm sure. It was between ten and eleven o'clock."

"I mean, you are sure he had been in my room?"

She nodded. "He came out as I was passing, and shut the door behind him. I thought he looked startled when he saw me."

"Oh, well, likely he wanted me to go somewhere with him," said Roth, with an attempt at lightness. "Thank you for telling me. Please don't mention it to any one else."

But he was greatly disturbed, for all that. He perfectly remembered locking his door, and he also remembered unlocking it on his return. Therefore, this Carter, a pleasant stranger, whose

acquaintance he had just made, must have used a key; which did away with the suggestion that the intrusion might have been merely casual, due to a sudden desire for his, Roth's, society. And now he came to think of it, Carter had arrived on the same train with him; had made the first steps toward acquaintance; had been very communicative about his own affairs, and had paved the way for similar confidences in return.

In the light of a sudden suspicion, he remembered that, without being too obvious, the fellow had been a good deal in evidence for several days. He was continually butting into him around the Chateau Montcalm; and once, when he had gone down to the little railway station to make inquiries about a train, there was Carter at the ticket window, also with inquiries. On the whole, it looked very much as if he had replaced the spy, Roach, whom Roth had dealt with so summarily. Then Carter must be the Walsh mentioned in the memo of instructions.

"Of course I won't mention it," Miss Randolph promised. "Perhaps I shouldn't have told you. Only, once or twice when we have been together, he seemed to be watching you."

So she had noticed that! Well, forewarned was forearmed. Now that the girl, in her innocence, had given him a hint, Carter's—or Walsh's—usefulness was gone. But it was important that he should not suspect that he in turn was suspected, for that would probably mean his replacement by another.

"Imagination," he said easily. "Why on earth should he watch me? It's much more likely that *you* are the attraction."

"But, of course, I wasn't in your room. Is he a detective, Mr. Roth? Have you done anything wrong?"

"I have been on my good behavior—since I have known you, at least."

"You have been very nice," she admitted gravely. "I think you are nicer when you are not trying to flirt. Why do you try?"

The directness of the question confused Roth for a moment. "Do you think I am trying to flirt with you?" he asked lamely.

"Certainly you are," she asserted calmly. "I suppose you can't help it, though—in this case." She dimpled charmingly. "In fact," she added, "you tried to flirt with me in the hotel in Montreal before we were introduced. That was very naughty."

Roth stared at her. "Might I suggest," he said, "that you did not appear to be offended—that you rather invited it!"

"Because I looked at you, you mean? Like this!" The dark, childlike eyes sought his, held them, wavered, drooped, and lifted again. It was the exact glance she had given him when he had first seen her. She laughed deliciously. "Every girl knows that trick. Don't *you?*"

Roth smiled, in spite of his chagrin. "I know it—yes. But I didn't think you did."

"Of course you didn't. Nobody thinks I'm grown up. If I had been older—I mean, if I had looked older—it wouldn't have fooled you for a little minute, would it?"

"No," Roth admitted. "Are you sure of your age? You talk sometimes like a woman of thirty."

She gave him a quick glance. "I'm almost eighteen," she said, with a schoolgirl's dignity, "and that is quite old. I know girls who have married at seventeen."

"I predict," said Roth, "that you will marry before you are nineteen."

"I don't think so; I mean to have a lot of fun first."

"Why not after?"

"When I am married I won't flirt, of course."

"Your husband," said Roth cynically, "will be an exceptionally lucky man. So flirting is your idea of fun? Not a bad one, either, but a little dangerous. You are a very pretty girl; what is fun for you may be serious for others. Take my own case as an example."

"My goodness, I haven't been flirting with you!" exclaimed the girl. "You've been doing it all yourself."

"Did it ever occur to you that I wasn't flirting—that I had learned to think a great deal of you?" Roth's voice was very deep and earnest as he leaned forward, and he endeavored to look as if he meant the words. He flattered himself that he made the speech very well. He was piqued; he liked the girl; and he wanted her to like him, he was not quite sure why.

"Ah, Ludwig, if I could but believe!" sighed the maiden languishingly. "Dost love me, then—dost love me truly?"

"What?" gasped Roth.

"Aren't they the right lines?" She laughed. "You are so funny when you try to make love. You do it exactly as they do it on the stage. If you'll come down home some time I'll get a nice boy to give you some lessons in the real thing. Now, please don't be offended. I like you too much to flirt. Let's be just friends."

"You," said Roth, with conviction, "are a little tease. I never met a girl quite like you. You are positively dangerous. Therefore, I am going to take you home to your father—Edith."

"Miss Randolph, please!" very severely.

"Between friends? Nonsense!" He picked up the paddle, and thrust strongly. The canoe seemed to leap from the shadowed river into the sunlit blue of Lake Placid. "Upon my soul," he said reflectively, "I half believe I could fall in love with you."

"Don't you half believe you have?" she asked demurely.

And for once in his life Roth had no answer ready.

V.

"How long do you figure on staying here?" Carter asked casually.

He was a young man of medium height, exceedingly well put together, and he wore a close-clipped, pointed beard, which made him look older than his age. Apparently, he attached no importance to the question.

Roth smiled guilelessly. "Until I get tired of it," he answered. "I suppose another week will do me. I really ought to be getting busy by then."

They sat on the spacious veranda of the Chateau Montçalm, lazily watching the changing colors of the western sky. The sun had sunk behind the Laurentides, and its light, striking a bank of clouds, transformed it into a wondrous continent, adrift in space, with mountain ranges peaked and castellated, seas and great plains, drenched in a flood of gold and crimson, soft and beautiful. But neither of the men had eyes for its beauties just then.

"That's me, too," said Carter, shifting his cigar. "Blamed if I know when I will pull out. This simple life suits me, all right, all right. And, thank Heaven, I've got a partner who can run the business alone."

"Not much doing this time of year, anyhow," said Roth. It amused him to hear the other lie.

"Nothing like in the spring. All the same, you can't tell. I haven't got your excuse for staying."

"My excuse?"

"Sure. She's a pretty kid. Excuse me; none of my business, of course."

"See here," Roth growled, "that last statement of yours is a fact. Better remember it!"

"Oh, all right," said Carter, unruffled. "I said it wasn't any of my funeral; neither it is. I've every respect for the young lady, but I know a peach when I see one, same as you do. She and her old man are the real goods—genuine Southern aristocracy, with coin to back it, which last is rather rare. He could be governor of his State if he wanted to."

Roth eyed him unpleasantly. "You seem to know a whole lot about them."

"Just what I've told you, and no more," said Carter. "Nothing to put your bristles up, far as I can see. If you don't like it, you can do the other thing."

Roth swore under his breath. But it was no part of his plan to quarrel with the man; that would have been most impolitic. For two days he had been quietly observing him, with the result that his suspicions were confirmed. He had ascertained that he was under close surveillance; and yet

it was done so quietly and unobtrusively that but for Edith Randolph's words he would have suspected nothing.

For the first time, he became seriously alarmed. He felt something akin to the fear of the hunted animal. It came to him that he was a marked man; that his every shift and turn was known, observed, reported on, and filed for reference. Roach had been a blunderer, a joke, a thing to laugh at; but his successor was a very different proposition. For a few unpleasant hours, Roth's nerve was shaken.

And then it stiffened. As long as he kept off United States soil, Carter was harmless. And, now that he had warning, it would be odd if he could not hit upon a plan to outwit him. But, though he cudgeled his cunning brain through sleepless nights, he failed to find a scheme that was entirely satisfactory, for the reason that there was no one whom he could trust to help him.

"All right," he said to Carter. "I didn't mean to take you up so shortly. Sorry if I was rude."

"Let it go," said Carter generously. "No harm done. They're good folks, the Randolphs. I've heard of 'em from a cousin of mine down that way."

Later, Roth found a seat beside Edith Randolph.

"You've been a truant," she scolded. "I wanted to see you. We may leave to-morrow."

"Leave!" Roth ejaculated in surprise. Considerably to his astonishment, he felt a strange sense of impending loss. "Why, your father said nothing about it."

"He didn't know till half an hour ago. Some bothering law business in New York. We will spend a week there, and then go home."

"I'm sorry," said Roth, and he meant it. "I counted on that much more time here."

"Well, we may not go for a couple of days; daddy is expecting another telegram."

Judge Randolph, the inevitable black cigar protruding from beneath his white mustache, bore down on them.

"I've been breaking the sad news to Mr. Roth, daddy," said his daughter.

The judge chuckled, and patted her shoulder with beautiful parental tenderness. "I hope you did it gently. Yes, it's too bad that business should interfere with my holiday—just as I was getting to know the best fishing grounds, too. However, I'll come back next year."

"And what about *my* holiday?" pouted his daughter. "I think you're selfish. Not a word about *me*."

"As far as I am aware, your holiday is continuous," said the judge. "The—ah—responsibilities of life press upon you about as heavily as upon a kitten. When you are older——"

"Oh, yes, I know," she interrupted impatiently. "Then I will realize that these were my happiest days. I wish to goodness, daddy, *you'd* realize that I'm grown up. I'm tired of being treated like a little girl."

"Shouldn't look so much like one, then," retorted her father. "Really, Roth, the child thinks she's a young lady."

"A very charming one," said Roth promptly.

The judge stared. "Good Lord, man, she's only——"

"Daddy! I refuse to be discussed before Mr. Roth. Have you had that telegram?"

"Not yet," said the judge. "We may have one more day—perhaps two."

"And we must have a whole day in Montreal, you know," said the girl.

"Oh, must we?" said the judge "Why?"

"A nice old gentleman promised me a set of furs," she replied. "I'm going to hold him to his word. And I've *heaps* of things to buy."

The judge groaned in mock dismay. "I shall begin to believe you're grown up. Better wait till we get to New York."

"No," said the girl. "I can buy what I want cheaper in Montreal."

"Yes; and then pay a forty per cent. duty, and have all sorts of trouble," grumbled the judge. "That's a woman

for you. Want to make up a rubber, Roth?"

But Roth preferred the veranda, and, though he did not say so, the society of the speaker's daughter. Judge Randolph passed ponderously in search of his game.

"Daddy hates bother," said Edith. "I can get *such* bargains in the Montreal stores."

"But, as he says, you'll have to pay a heavy duty on almost anything," Roth commented.

She cocked her head on one side, and regarded him very much like a mischievous, bright-eyed little bird.

"Do you suppose I'm going to tell the customs people what I've bought?"

"They're mighty apt to find out without being told," said Roth, from his experience.

"You're a man," she announced, with obvious contempt. "I've never yet had a customs officer do more than lift the lid of my trunk. And, anyway"—this confidentially—"what I'm going to buy I can carry in my pocket."

"You mean——"

"A diamond brooch. A dear! Yes, I'm going to smuggle it. But, for pity's sake, don't tell daddy. He'd throw a f—I mean, he wouldn't approve. I daren't let him know I've bought it until we get home. And, then, I'll bet he'll send conscience money to Washington."

But Roth hardly heard her, for in his mind was born the idea he had vainly sought for days. It leaped at him suddenly, and he almost laughed as he welcomed it.

"No," he said thoughtfully, "I don't believe any customs officer would suspect you. I wouldn't, and I know their ways pretty well." He smiled grimly. "You don't think it wrong to smuggle, then?"

"Not little things that one wants oneself. Why should I pay their silly old duty on my brooch and clothes? I'm sure the government has enough money without that."

"Quite right," said Roth. "I'm glad you look at it that way. I wonder if you would do something for me in New York?"

"Of course I will—if I can," laughed the girl. "What is it?"

"You see," said Roth slowly, for he was constructing the story as he went along, "it's a somewhat delicate thing. No, on second thoughts, I don't believe I should ask you to do it."

"Do you mean you don't trust me?" she demanded.

"Oh, heavens, no!" Roth protested. "Of course I trust you, absolutely. Only I don't want to get you into trouble—not that there's much chance of that, after all."

"Now, you'll have to tell me all about it," said the girl eagerly. "If there's a secret, I've just got to hear it. I can be awfully discreet when I like."

"No doubt of that," Roth commented dryly. "Well, this is the way of it. Old Hermann Krantz—he's a German by birth, as I am by extraction—runs a big jewelry establishment in New York. You may perhaps have heard of him. He has a daughter, Pauline, who is to be married in a very few days. When I went to England last month, Mr. Krantz gave me a letter of introduction to a Miss Outram, his wife's sister. The Outrams are an old Devonshire family, and Miss Outram is the last of them. She is one of the dearest old ladies I ever met, but I'm afraid she has fallen upon rather hard times. Well, she gave me a little parcel for Pauline—a wedding present, as she explained. It's a necklace—an heirloom—very old and, I think, very valuable. And here's the trouble. That necklace is dutiable. Miss Outram didn't know that, and I didn't think of it. I don't want to pay the duty myself, and I can't very well ask Mr. Krantz to do it; neither, of course, could I write to Miss Outram, if I did pay it. Poor old lady, I don't suppose she could raise the money."

"I see," nodded the girl. "It's a shame to charge duty on a wedding present. If I were you, I shouldn't say a word about it to the customs people."

"I don't intend to," Roth admitted.

"But I haven't told you all my difficulty. I find I have to go up to the Cobalt silver country before going to New York, so that I can't possibly reach there before the wedding. Now, how on earth is Miss Krantz to get the present in time, unless I can find somebody to take it to her?"

"Meaning me," said Edith Randolph, laughing. "Such a fuss about nothing. I'd like the fun of taking it. How big is the parcel? Can I hide it easily?"

"It's very small," Roth replied. "You could put it in your pocket. But I hate to ask you to do it. There isn't one chance in ten thousand of any trouble, of course. Still, if there were any——"

"But there won't be," she said lightly. "I think we are going down in some big railway man's private car, and he will know all the people, of course. Even if we don't, it will be all right. I'm not a bit afraid."

"It's awfully good of you," said Roth. "I'll think it over to-night, and if there's any other way I won't trouble you. But if I do, I'll put a note in the package explaining the matter to Mr. Krantz. You'll give it to him personally, please, at his place of business. Don't trust any one else."

"I'll be very careful," she promised, and leaned back in her chair, her hands clasped above her head.

Judge Randolph came toward them through the gathering darkness. In his hand was a telegram.

"We've got our marching orders, little girl," said he. "Can you be ready to catch the morning train at eight o'clock? That will give you five hours in Montreal."

"Five hours!" she cried. "I wanted a whole day, daddy!"

"I know, puss, but it can't be helped," said the judge kindly. "Fitzpatrick wants us to go down in his private car. You'd better pack up to-night. I have some writing to do, myself. Mr. Roth, I'll bid you good-by now. Glad to have made your acquaintance. If you're ever down our way, remember we shall be very glad to see you." He shook hands heartily, and reëntered the hotel.

"Isn't it horrid?" said Miss Randolph. She rose. "Well, I suppose I must do as I'm told. You'd better let me have the necklace to-night, I think."

"I have to write the note," said Roth. "I'll do it now, and meet you here in half an hour or so. Come down when you're ready."

When he reached his room, Roth covered the transom with a bath towel, hung his coat over the keyhole, and pulled down the blinds. Not till then did he switch on the light. He loosened his clothing and unbuckled a belt worn next his skin. The belt was of soft doeskin, about three inches wide, divided into tiny compartments, neatly sewn up. Laying it upon the table, he ripped the sewing with a keen knife blade. Each compartment contained one or more flat packages nearly three inches long by two in width, wrapped in thin white paper; each package was numbered and lettered. Selecting one, he opened it. A huddle of brilliants flashed back the glare of the electric light in gorgeous iridescence.

Roth took a fountain pen from his pocket, and drew a pad toward him, but he did not immediately begin to write. Instead, he reviewed the situation, scowling at the blank page.

It was by no means from choice that he was about to trust a fortune in precious stones to the care of a schoolgirl; but it seemed to him that he had no other alternative. He knew that he had been shadowed from the day he had landed in Montreal. The letter of instructions abstracted from the pocket of the man, Roach, was plain enough. Roach had been instantly replaced by another. True, he might give him the slip; but he knew that his description was in the hands of every customs official along the entire northern line, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and an attempt to get through with his goods would probably mean disaster. The longer he delayed, the tighter the net would draw; he could not hope to beat the government of the United States at a waiting game.

To save his life, he could not recall one false step, one clue which had put these men on his track. He had always been careful; he had worked absolutely alone; and no one, with the exception of Krantz, knew his real occupation. Krantz was true blue, he was sure of that. He could not afford to be otherwise. The main, the all-important, thing was to get the stones to him at once.

Going over it for the hundredth time, he could see no way in which he could safely take them himself. False trunk bottoms, hollow canes, stuffed cigars, dummy cartridges—none of these time-honored devices, excellent when the owner was unsuspected, looked good enough. He knew perfectly well that the treasury agents would take to pieces every article he possessed, and put the pieces through a sieve, if necessary. Therefore, some one else must be the bearer; and that some one must be absolutely trustworthy and free from suspicion.

Which brought him by a circuitous route to his starting point. Was it safe to trust them to the girl? He thought it was. She was obviously little more than a child; she was traveling with her father, a man of assured position; no suspicion could possibly attach to her. She believed his story, and would not think of opening the package. Where on the face of the earth could he find a safer messenger?

To Roth's credit, be it said that he would not, for the value of the stones themselves, have exposed the girl to what he considered a real risk. But, so far as he could see, she ran none whatever. There is no reason under heaven why, if they can be packed small enough, a million dollars' worth of goods cannot be brought into any country by an unsuspected person. No, from his experienced view, the girl risked nothing.

He wrote Krantz briefly, signed the note, and parceled up the stones. The package, when sealed and carefully tied, was little larger than two packs of playing cards. He weighed it in his hand, well pleased. And then he put them in his pocket, switched off the light, and went downstairs to keep his appointment.

For once, he appeared to have eluded Carter; that individual was nowhere to be seen. Roth chuckled to himself, and looked down the veranda. The glint of a white dress caught his eye. Edith Randolph was waiting. She took his arm, and they strolled through the pine-scented gloom toward the lake.

An hour later, Judge Randolph patted his daughter fondly on the head. "You are a credit to your father, me chee-ild," he announced.

"You bet she is, Jim," said Mr. Carter. "Well, I must let Roth see me on the job before he goes to bed. I figure he'll wait a couple of days, and then break through by way of the Falls, or maybe Detroit. Good-by, both of you."

"So long, Charlie," said the girl. "See you in Chi. next week."

"It is an appointment," said Mr. Carter significantly, "that I am not apt to miss."

VI.

Hermann Krantz shut the door of his private office with care, turned and extended a welcoming hand to Ludwig Roth. Krantz was massively built, heavy in flesh, leonine and rugged of features. His eyes were a beautifully secretive blue, and he wore a huge blond beard, streaked with gray; his voice was a deep bass, and he spoke slowly, with the finality of a tolling bell.

"I haf been egsbecting you for some days already," he said. "Now you haf at last gome."

"Then it's all right, is it?" said Roth, with an air of relief. "I had one devil of a time. I couldn't get here sooner. I came around by Detroit."

Krantz shoved an open box of black perfectos across the desk. Himself, he lit a huge brown meerschaum, with an eighteen-inch stem. The blue clouds rolled above his leonine head. He wagged it solemnly.

"So," he commented. "Again you see a pretty girl, I suppose. You haf a teufel of a dime mit her. Yes!"

"Well, she was pretty enough, anyway," said Roth. "By George, it was a piece of luck striking her, as things turned out."

"Dot may be so," said Krantz. "But iss it business?"

"It was the best I could do," Roth replied. "I had to fake that wedding-present story offhand."

"Some dime you shall tell it to me, if it iss a good story," said Krantz. "You gome aroundt by Detroidt, eh! Why?"

"Why, because I wanted to give the girl a start," Roth explained. "I was sure I'd be detained at the line, but I wasn't. I can't understand that part of it."

"All iss well dot gomes to a good end," said Krantz; "but if you thought you would be by der gustoms folk at Detroidt detained, why did you go there?"

"Why, hang it, Krantz! I wanted to give the girl time to get to you, don't you see? I was willing enough to be stopped and searched; they couldn't find anything."

"You speak in gonundrums," said Krantz. "Haf you hit der booze dis *morgen?* I don'd understandt."

"You don't! What's the matter with your head? When I gave the girl the diamonds I wanted to be sure she had delivered them to you before I made a move. See?"

"Haf you gone grazy—what?" shouted the German. "What girl? What diamondts? I haf seen neither!"

Roth leaped to his feet.

"Do you mean that? I tell you I was watched day and night by the customs detectives. I gave the diamonds —fifthy thousand dollars' worth of them—to this girl to bring to you!"

"Herr lieber Gott!"

"Did you get them?" cried Roth, his face ashen. "Did you get them, I say? Don't try to hold out on me, damn you!"

With a catlike bound, he was beside the German, his fist clinched and drawn back, his jaw thrust forward within six inches of the big man's beard, demanding the naked truth with blazing eyes.

Krantz sprang back, with a quickness marvelous in a man of his weight. He raised his hand, and his voice rang true.

"By *Gott,* I haf not der girl nor der stones *gesehen!* Und if you start der rough house, Ludwig Roth, by *Himmel!* I will your *verdammt* neck mit my two hands wring."

The words and tone carried belief.

Roth dropped into a chair, white and shaking.

"Something must have happened to her!" he croaked huskily. "I gave them to her four days ago. She was to leave Montreal for New York with her father the day after. Great Scott, Krantz, do you suppose the customs officers stopped her?"

"I don'd suppose noddings, because I don'd know noddings," said the big German coldly. "You haf der rattles. You like a man mit der D. T.'s shake. Get a grip mit yourself, und gome down to brass tacks. Stard at der beginnings, und egsblain!"

With an effort, Roth pulled himself together. Krantz punctuated the narrative with guttural German oaths. At the conclusion, he whirled in his chair, and jerked the desk phone toward him savagely.

"Gif me 0616 Broad. Hello! Iss dot der Potomac? Haf you staying dere Judge Randolph, of Firginia, und his daughter, Miss Randolph? Yes, two or dree days ago." His corded fist pounded the desk softly, as he awaited the reply. "You haf *not!* You are quite sure? Thank you."

Half a dozen other numbers yielded the same negative result. He turned to Roth.

"You see? It iss der one best bet dot dey are not in New York!"

"There are a thousand hotels," Roth objected.

"Dot iss very true. Und dere are but dree hundert und sixty-five days in

der year. Judge Randolph iss an attorney—so? Mid whom was his law business here?"

Roth shook his head. "He didn't tell me. I never asked him. Miss Randolph said they would stay at the Potomac."

"Where dey are not." Krantz picked up the telephone again. "His home iss in Roanoke, yes? I haf no aguaindance dere; but I will wire Wilhelm Clauss, of Richmond, who knows by rebutation efery man worth knowing in dot State." He dictated for a moment, put down the phone, and regarded Roth mournfully. "It iss in my mind, mein freundt, dot we haf been skinned!"

"I can't believe it," said Roth. "Why, Krantz, Miss Randolph was a mere schoolgirl. She doesn't know the value of the package. It was sealed; she wouldn't open it; she thought it was a wedding present. And, anyway, I'd bet my life that she is straight as a true level."

"A man dot bets his life on any woman but his mother iss a fool," said the German didactically. "I haf heard you say so midout dot excebtion. Are you in love mit dis girl?"

"Never mind," growled Roth. "Wait till you hear from Clauss."

Late that afternoon came the reply. Roanoke owned no Judge Randolph.

"Clauss is wrong," declared Roth obstinately; "I tell you, Krantz, he's wrong. He must be. Why, that infernal detective himself told me the judge could be governor of Virginia, if he cared to run for it!"

"So!" said the other. He reached for the brown meerschaum, and inhaled deep draughts of smoke. "Clauss iss not wrong," he said, after a pause. "He knows. We haf been skinned, mein friendt, dot iss all. No, hear me oudt. It was a clever game. Some one knew when you would reach Montreal mit der diamondts. Dot some one knew your weakness for a pretty face. Der girl was der bait. Der detectives dot shadowed you, day and night—*ach, mein friendt,* but you were blind!—dey were to scare you so dot you should not dare cross der line yourself mid der stones. Iss it not so? Dot memorandum of instrugtions dot you stole from out der pocket of one—if you had not done so, it would have been left where you could find it. It was a plant, dot. Did not der girl put you next to der odder one, hey? How did you der go-by give dem when der diamondts were in her hands, tell me? Why were you not stopped at Detroidt? Did she not say she would a brooch und furs herself smuggle? Dot was a slick steer, *mein* Ludwig—*nicht wahr?* Ah-r-r!" he snarled, his huge hands clutching the air in impotent fury, all the placidity gone from his face. *"Du lieber Gott,* I could strangle dem, one by one, und sleep the better for it!"

The mask fell again, leaving him apparently calm.

"You were a sucker, *mein friendt,* a lamb among wolfs, a fall guy for dere leedle game. Dot iss all!"

"I guess you're right," said Roth bitterly. "I see it now." He swore a great oath. "The little devil! And I tried to flirt with her!"

"'What a man soweth, dot shall he also reap,'" quoted Krantz. "Der money loss I will share mit you, as I should have shared der brofits. But der blow to your *verdammt* vanity, *friendt* Ludwig—dot you must bear alone."

The Fugitive Freshman

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "The Stroke Oar," "The Head Coach," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Thomas Whittaker Meserve, Jr., a rich man's son, makes a failure of his college course. His chum wishes to save him from being taken home by his father, and Meserve draws up a list of his delinquencies for discussion. This list is accidently sent to his father, and Tom decides to flee from the paternal wrath. He falls in with Jack Hogan, an honorably discharged sergeant in the regular army. Hogan takes a liking to him, and finds work for himself and Tom in a railroad construction gang bound for Key West. Tom drops his last name and is known as Whittaker. Shortly after reaching Key West Hogan discovers an attempt at whiskey-running; and leaving Tom on guard, goes for men. When the squad arrives, the whiskey-running boat has disappeared, and Tom cannot be found.

IV.

THE freshman had set out for his post of duty in a heady and high-stepping mood. Jack Hogan was the man to follow through thick and thin, thought he, and here were hazard and adventure right on the first page of the opening chapter of their comradeship. With beating heart he prowled along the beach, moving more slowly as he lost sight of the camp, taking alarm at the splashing ripple of the incoming tide.

At length he came to the cove, and halted, his nerves twitching while he strove to see into the gloom beyond. He could discern nothing that resembled a boat, but fancied the light breeze brought to his ears the low murmur of voices. Unless he could hide himself nearer, the boat might slip away without his knowledge.

Tom was a novice at this kind of scouting duty, and it appeared easy to pick a path through the mangrove and insure his mission against the chance of fiasco. The interlaced roots were like a series of traps and pitfalls, however, and their long tentacles were slippery with the slime and wash of the tide.

To his immense disgust, the freshman found himself almost helpless, groping, tripping, cutting his hands and tearing his clothes on the clusters of raccoon oyster shells that grew along the mangrove roots.

Thomas tried to swerve toward the beach—anything to get clear of this half-submerged jungle, and suddenly found himself sprawled out upon a mesh of pendulous branches which creaked and swayed. Rubbing the mud from his eyes, he could see the "booze boat" some distance beyond, and slowly moving away. There were signs of alarm on board. Men were moving hurriedly to and fro, and the freshman heard a confused sound of orders and warnings. One voice louder than the rest stormily exclaimed:

"I tell you somebody was thrashin'' through the mangrove yonder. And it ain't none of our friends, for we ain't heard no whistle like we fixed up as the signal. Mebbe there's guards out, after all. I don't pine for no load of buckshot in my innards. Keep her under way, Jerry, an' stand by your oars. Loose the jib halyard, Bill. Now, shet up and listen good."

Thomas had forgotten that breath-

This serial began in the first January issue—price fifteen cents, at any newsdealer's.

ing was considered necessary to sustain life. No more desperately did he hold his breath than did he clutch the oozy branches upon which he was spread-eagled in this most unhappy plight. His weight was bending the fragile support lower and lower, making it more difficult to retreat by the way he had come. And to advance was to land himself upon the open shore, a fair target for the men in the boat.

While he was miserably wondering what could be done, the issue was snatched from his keeping. Shifting his weight to brace himself more securely, the overburdened branches tilted and snapped, and his hands slid vainly along their slimy surfaces for a fresh grip.

The law of gravity abruptly took charge of the fate of Thomas Whittaker Meserve, Jr., and with a cry of fright he slipped headlong and plunged into the shallow water and full tilt against the ragged coral reef. Even as he lunged downward, he flung his arms out to save his head from striking; but the impact was so violent that he was stunned, and could only flounder in feeble, instinctive fashion to raise his face above the water that was strangling him.

The crew of the "booze boat" heard the startling commotion, and were for instant flight, but their leader cried with a crackling volley of oaths:

"He fell in and hurt himself. Hear him splashin' like a turtle in a crawl? Served him right. I reckon he's drowndin' sure 'nough. 'Tain't none of our business."

"I'd put a load of shot into him to make sure," growled another, "but we don't allow to make no more racket'n we can help. How about his comin' to and goin' back to camp? He may have been there long enough to know us if he sees us again."

"Murder goes agin' my stummick," spoke up a third. "I ain't afraid of the cou'ts. No Key West jury ever found a Conch guilty yit, but I'm goin' to fish that cuss aboard. We can dump him ashore somewhere else."

The skipper objected, but his men sided with the soft-hearted person aforesaid, and two of them waded toward Thomas, who had been struggling more and more feebly while this argument raged. When picked up by the feet and shoulders, he was at the last gasp and wholly unconscious. Bundling him into the cockpit of the sloop, the whisky runners dragged the limp figure forward out of their way and let him lie between the centreboard well and the canvas wall of the tiny cabin. They dared not make a light to see how badly he was hurt, and were presently mightily busied with their own affairs, for, from the shore toward the camp, there arose a shocking uproar of men embroiled in a dire quarrel, and the skipper exclaimed:

"There'll be no booze landed tonight. Our pals are in trouble, an' the key is too hot for us. Hoist jib and mainsail. Heave on them oars. Do you want a stick o' dynamite flyin' aboard?"

The sloop shot away from the shore, fled for the nearest channel between the keys, and, once in open water, caught sufficient breeze from seaward to make her heel with tautened sheets.

Instead of heading for the wide spaces of the Hawk Channel and the quickest route for Key West, she dodged in among the maze of keys until her trail would have been difficult to find by daylight. The crew saw the searchlights of the engineers' launches pencil the dark skyline in random, bootless quest. Pursuit was a jest in this game of hide and seek.

The youth in the canvas cabin called attention to himself by moaning and incoherent murmuring. The man who had insisted that he be taken aboard crawled forward with a lighted lantern in his fist and called back:

"He's bloodied up powerful bad, cap'n. Reckon he stove his head on the reef. Where you goin' to take him to? He'll sit up and kick before long, and you don't want him to look us over by daylight."

The skipper ducked under the cabin roof, and said peevishly:

"Ought to left him where he was.

I aim to get shet of him right soon. How about settin' him ashore on Little Spanish Key? He won't find his own camp in a hurry, and we'll have plenty o' time to git under cover and run this stuff, somehow. It ain't likely he'll remember what happened to him to-night."

"There ain't nobody livin' on Little Spanish, is there?" asked the other. "There wa'n't, when I went by there last winter."

"It's nice and lonesome," returned the skipper. "Some sponger or fisherman'll most likely take him off before he turns up his toes. Anyhow, the doggoned fool is in my way, and he ought to thank me for not leavin' him to feed the sharks. I'm soft-hearted as mush, I am."

Thomas heard fragments of this talk, as if the voices were a great way off. He could not understand why Jack Hogan was not with him. His head throbbed with torturing pulsations, and all strength seemed to have left him. Unresistingly, he was moved into the cockpit and propped against the coamings while the most humane of the ruffians sponged his head with salt water.

A little later, the sloop turned from the winding channel and was hove to close to the low shore of Little Spanish Key. Two men picked up the freshman, waded to the beach with him, and left him lying beside a stunted tree above high-water mark, for all the world like a marooned buccaneer. The friendly rascal of the crew shortly returned with a small breaker of fresh water, a bottle of his villainous whisky, and a basket of odds and ends of food.

The coolness of the dawn had fled, and the summer sun was blazing high in the sky when Thomas Meserve sat up, gazed about him, and limited his remarks to a most emphatic "Ouch!" His head still ached violently, every muscle had its own particular twinge, and he felt as weak as an infant in arms.

At twenty years, however, a healthy youth can stand a deal of banging, and his skull is not easily cracked beyond repair. Wherefore, before he began to take stock of his woes, this derelict swigged long at the water keg, topped it off with a heartening nip at the black bottle, and munched hard-tack and a stringy fragment of ham with great zest.

Bit by bit, the events of the amazing night were pieced together; but of his voyage in the "booze boat" his recollections were hopelessly befogged. He had been kidnapped and dumped upon a strange shore—this much was fairly obvious. But where was the key from which he had been snatched by force?

His smarting eyes beheld one low, ragged islet after another lying awash in almost every direction; between them the marvelous green and blue and violet sea stretching in crooked channels, wide lagoons, and sparkling inlets. Far to the eastward glimmered a pearly fleck of sail, but the near-by waters were empty of craft. The castaway turned to survey his desert island, muttering disgustedly:

"If this is a bad dream, it is positively the worst ever. I wish Jack Hogan would roll over and kick me wide awake. Hum! More water-soaked scenery—millions of long-legged bushes like I tumbled out of last night—and that is about all. Did I ever say anything about looking for adventures? Excuse me."

Leaning heavily against the tree beneath which he had found himself, he descried a clump of tall pines at the farther end of the key, and wisely concluded that higher and dryer land must lie in that quarter. There was driftwood lodged in the mangrove growth—some of it six feet higher than the beach—and the freshman cared not to wait where he was until the next high tide, lest it might confirm this ominous hint.

Taking off his leather belt, he looped it around the little water keg, slung the ends over his shoulder, and found he could manage to carry the food basket with the other hand, not forgetting to tuck the bottle therein, in case of urgent need.

Before getting under way, he washed face and head in the tepid salt water, and knotted his handkerchief around it to cover the scalp wound, which had ceased to bleed. Then, wearily dragging one foot after another, he moved toward the landmark of the distant pine trees, his progress impeded by the loathsome luxuriance of the mangrove.

It was an infernal kind of a struggle, and more than once he lost heart and slumped down in his tracks. Strength and courage were at lowest ebb when he came to firmer footing and a grateful carpeting of wiry grass, in which sprawled clusters of dwarfed, saw-toothed palmetto. There was respite, also, from the stifling, choking heat of the jungle, and from the swarms of insects which had filled the swamp. The exhausted pilgrim flopped upon the grass, and lay with his head on his arm.

There was no shade from the blistering sun, however, and the refugee dragged himself to his feet a little later and tottered onward, hoping to reach the distant haven of the trees and fashion a rude camp, although his knowledge of woodcraft was very meagre.

He was an object to frighten and repel a respectable person, if such there had been to observe him. Shirt and trousers were torn and splotched with mud and blood; his countenance, unshaven for several days, was scratched and stained, while the grimy handkerchief, knotted about his temples, lent a truly piratical touch to his disreputable, forbidding aspect.

In college, Thomas had been scrupulously particular in such matters, and the classmates who had called him "the natty boy" would have utterly failed to identify him in his present plight. Not that he cared, for life had resolved itself into the elemental struggle for survival, in which tailors and haberdashers are of no account whatever.

Having taken it for granted that the key was uninhabited, the freshman came at length to a bit of rising ground; and, propping his weary frame against a pine tree, gazed at a small clearing, a low-roofed cottage consisting mostly of wide verandas, and a wharf running out over a sheltered lagoon.

The castaway was giddy and dazed by fatigue and hurts, and for the moment he could hardly credit his blinking vision. Mechanically clinging to his keg and basket, he stumbled down the slope, and drew near to a solidly constructed fence of barbed wire, the topmost strand considerably higher than his head. This barrier ran down into the water at its hither end, and appeared to stretch around the clearing with no sign of a gate.

Thomas looked in vain for tenants who might respond to his distress signals. He could think of nothing better to do than plod along outside the circuit of this cruel, impassable fence, and curse the inhumanity of man.

The place was not deserted. The pineapple patch and garden had been recently cultivated. Hammocks swung in shaded recesses of the verandas, which were screened against mosquitoes. A sailboat and power launch were moored near the wharf. A huge black cat strolled out from under a guava bush and insolently yawned at the wistful youth, who was very near weeping.

At length, his progress was abruptly checked. Facing him was a signboard, nailed to a post a few feet outside the fence. Its lettering was bold and black, and the message was startling, portentous:

STRANGERS BEWARE

THIS PLACE IS SET WITH SPRING GUNS AND STEEL MANTRAPS

"Great heavens!" cried Thomas, his voice shrill with abject terror, as if he had barely missed setting foot on a rattlesnake. Wheeling in headlong panic, he had bolted no more than a stride or two away from the fence when his foot was caught by a wire hidden in

the grass. As he tripped and fell forward with no chance to save himself, a stunning report crashed in his ears, the smell of powder smoke was in his nostrils, and a jarring concussion seemed to pitch him to earth with tremendous violence.

During the instant of consciousness before he ceased to think and feel, Thomas knew that he had been ambushed and slain by a spring gun. Then he lay as he had fallen, huddled, limp, inert.

The lethal weapon had gone off with a prodigious bang, shattering the dreamy quiet of the tropical clearing and the placid lagoon. A moment later, three persons rushed out of the cottage. The foremost of them was a girlish figure in white. Behind her lumbered a man of imposing girth and a crimson countenance, who was bawling commands at the top of his voice. An elderly negro advanced more slowly, wringing his hands and uttering broken, fervent prayers, as if he expected to behold a tragedy.

The girl, who ran swiftly, yet without awkwardness of gait, became hesitant as she neared the fence and gazed fearfully beyond. Catching a glimpse of the crumpled figure of the victim of the spring gun lying in the grass, she gasped, halted, and turned to cry in accents of consternation:

"Oh, father, what did I tell you? You have killed a man with your dreadful traps. He is just as dead as he can be. I saw him. Go round to the gate, quick. You, too, Levi. Bring him into the house. I knew it would happen some day."

The portly parent was disobedient, and tiptoed to the fence, where he puffed for breath. Then, while the ruddy richness of his complexion perceptibly paled, he sputtered:

"I—I—guess he is done for, Helen. It was an accident, I swear it was. The confounded thing never would go off before, you know that. It—it was perfectly harmless. Maybe he isn't dead, after all. Come, Levi. We shall have to carry him."

The speaker trotted heavily toward the farther side of the clearing, followed by the reluctant negro, who was mumbling with his eyes rolling heavenward:

"Good Lawd, please, oh, please, don't 'low me to be hung by mah neck till I'se daid. 'Deed I didn't set dem contraptions, an' I ain't killed nobody."

While these two sought the gate, the girl remained at the fence, fascinated and aghast, gazing at the ragged figure in the grass whose face was hidden. She noted the little water keg, the basket, and the black bottle, and murmured:

"One of those dreadful tramps from the railroad camps. He had run away, and was prowling around our place. Of course, he intended to rob us, and maybe kill us all, to-night. Yet I can't help feeling dreadfully sorry for him."

She was too well poised and vigorous to become hysterical, although it was by no means a common occurrence to have total strangers pot-shotted at the dooryard in this very hasty fashion.

Could the unfortunate freshman have surveyed her singularly winsome aspect, it is more than likely he would have clean forgotten that he had just been blown from the muzzle of a spring gun. In fact, one glimpse of her might have sufficed to make him grateful for the lamentable sequence of disasters that had brought him to this deplorable situation.

He was totally oblivious of all things, however, and apparently as dead as the proverbial herring.

The rescue party lugged the alleged corpse through the distant gate with much difficulty, and laid it, or him, upon a cot in a small, unused room of the cottage, removed from the living quarters by a breezy interval of veranda.

In falling, the late Thomas Whittaker Meserve Jr. had caused his scalp wound to bleed afresh, and, after a hasty, tremulous survey of the remains, his slayer concluded that the spring gun had blown out his brains.

This was so depressing a verdict that Mr. Stephen Eastabrook sat down

hastily, mopped his perspiring brow, and blurted to his daughter, who had joined him:

"God bless me, Helen; the damnable machine was so rusty that it simply couldn't go off. What am I going to do with this—with this—er"—Mr. Eastabrook gulped, lost color, and went on—"with this unfortunate person? Of course, he is a fugitive, homeless, friendless, probably a worthless, drunken scoundrel, for whom no search whatever will be made. It was a hideous accident, and—and—there are no other witnesses. Need there be any publicity?"

His fair, young daughter lost her temper. "You talk as if you were perfectly willing to bury him alive," she cried. "One might think I had an inhuman monster for a father. If you and Levi are too frightened to do anything, I will do my best to bring him to life."

She raised her voice in peremptory command, and the negro servant showed himself most unwillingly. He was sent after water and bandages, while the ministering angel blindly ransacked the medicine cupboard, unable to decide what household remedies were best suited to mend a patient bagged by a spring gun at pointblank range.

This delicate problem was solved by the victim himself, who sat up in the cot without warning, wrathfully shook his fist at the quaking Mr. Eastabrook, and remarked in weak but decisive tones:

"You tried to kill me, confound you; but you never touched me. I fainted, no wonder; but I came to while you were figuring how to dispose of my corpse. I heard you. Of all the cold-blooded——"

"I beg your pardon," gasped the gentleman addressed, and then he repeated the apology with tremendous solemnity, "I — beg — your — pardon. Really, this is a most delightful surprise. Are you sure you are not shot to pieces? Oh, Helen, come here, quick, and bring me a drink of brandy if you love me."

The daughter rushed to the room; and, at the sight of the astonishing tableau, dropped an armful of bottles, including witch-hazel, ammonia, and arnica, which smashed in common ruin. For the first time, she perceived that the stranger was young, and that if his face were washed, he would not be unpleasant to look upon. In other words, the fact that he was alive shifted her point of view, and awakened a different kind of interest. Recollecting, however, that as a scamp of lowest degree he deserved no more than charity, she cried with some asperity:

"What do you mean by scaring us all to death? But you have been hurt. Your head is bleeding. Hurry with that water, Levi."

Thomas fingered his scalp with considerable alarm, eyed the girl admiringly, and huskily replied:

"That is another story. I hate to be a nuisance; but is it a bad cut? I can't see it, you know. And if it ought to be sewed up, I suppose I'll have to borrow a needle and thread and catch up with my darning."

The patient was swaying as he made this brave speech, after which he fell back and lay with eyes closed, too weak for more bravado. He had flared up for the moment like a candle in a puff of breeze, but the effort had overtaxed his slender store of vitality. So near was he to losing consciousness again that he failed to hear the vivacious Helen exclaim to her agitated parent:

"Wasn't he spunky; and he is nothing but a boy, father! I shall try to mend his head at once. Just you keep perfectly cool, and help me all you can."

"A very desperate-looking boy—old enough to pack along a quart whisky bottle—and big enough to knock us in the head and loot the house if he had the chance," grumbled he. "I shall send Levi over to the chief engineer's headquarters in the launch and ask him to send after this runaway hobo of theirs."

Miss Helen stamped her foot, and frowned, as she returned with a brave air of finality:

"You will do nothing of the kind until this poor, wounded fugitive is able to walk. I never dreamed I had such a brute of a father. There! Hold this basin of water, and keep perfectly quiet while I cleanse this cut on his head. It is more bump than anything else. Plaster will do nicely. When I have finished, you are to fetch some of your clean clothes, and Levi will put him in bed. He did not talk in the least like a hobo, and his face is really nice and refined."

Mr. Eastabrook sighed explosively, cowed by his youthful daughter, who had assumed command of the situation. A few minutes later, she retired from the scene, after issuing further orders with notable hauteur, and Thomas was carefully ministered to and tucked in bed by the rejoicing Levi, who believed that he had escaped the gallows by a hair's breadth.

The young man slept heavily, hour after hour, in a kind of dreamless stupor, and the following morning came before he had sufficiently rallied to renew interest in his surroundings. Then he was recalled to himself by a delightful flash of memory, and his lips moved in the pious reflection:

"My goodness, but I am in luck! I never had much time for the girl proposition; but this is different. She is an angel, and a corker. I suppose the old man will throw me out before I have a chance to see her again."

Just then Levi entered, and laid upon a chair the raiment belonging to the disreputable guest, every garment washed, mended, and pressed; a deed of mercy which fairly astounded Thomas, who spoke his almost tearful gratitude.

"Don't thank me. It was Miss Helen what tol' me to fix yo' things all shipshape," replied the negro. "Of cou'se, I knows you is po' white trash, an' don't look fo' no sich treatment; but Miss Helen is sof'-hearted that-a-way. An' we-all is sure thankin' our Maker fo' not fillin' yo' system plumb full o' buckshot. My orders is to give yo' breakfas' in bed an' ask you is you still alive an' kickin'."

"I am not kicking so you would notice it," said Thomas, smiling with no resentment at being called "poor white trash," for he perceived that Levi had his own dignity to safeguard. "But I am afraid I won't be able to move on for several days. I am very shaky, and my head is a merry-go-round. Please tell the young lady that I thank her with all my heart, and most humbly apologize for keeling over before I was shot, and making such a footless nuisance of myself. I was never trained to be hunted over by spring guns, Levi."

"Well, I do declare; yo' conversation am right elegant an' scrumptious," exclaimed the old servant. Then he asked with childish eagerness: "Is you in disguise, please, suh? I kin keep a secret shet up tight in my breas'. There ain't no railroad han's in dese keys what talks that-a-way, there sure ain't."

"Your failure to appreciate me at my true worth is a pardonable error. I shall not consider it a misdemeanor," impressively commented Thomas, thinking to bombard Levi while he had him on the defensive.

"Mistah Eastabrook hisself 'ud have to rise bright an' early to beat that 'sortment o' language," cried Levi. "How'd a couple o' fresh aigs an' a col' grapefruit an' a mite of guava jelly an' hot biscuit tickle yo' palate dis mawnin', suh? When I was mendin' yo' clo'es I had mah s'picions. An' yo' is used to wearin' good clo'es. Now I knows it."

Levi bobbed his white head with well-trained courtesy, and ambled to the kitchen, chuckling and talking to himself, as if he had shrewdly fathomed a secret of vast importance. As for Thomas, himself, he had no intention of confessing that he was a truant, a failure, and a bit of human flotsam. His was no heroic tale to win favor in the eyes of a maiden, and his brief comradeship with Jack Hogan had bred in him a more manly fibre. He had not even proved himself capable of earning the wages of a common laborer. With the unquenchable optimism of youth, he expected to hammer out a sturdy ca-

reer, but he was still a sorry kind of a joke.

As his mind cleared, he began to wonder what and who this father and his daughter could be. They, too, must have suffered misfortune, to be living on one of these tropical keys in the summer time.

They were not natives, of this much he was sure. The impetuous Mr. Eastabrook must have made a wreck of things somewhere else, or he would not thus have marooned himself and his daughter in this mosquito-cursed pineapple patch.

Thomas meditated at great length for lack of anything better to do, until he was diverted by overhearing a dialogue wafted from the veranda. The lord of the cottage was emphatic, and his daughter was insistent.

"I fortified the place to keep out those runaway railroad ruffians," he was saying. "I had to do it in self-defense. And now that I have laid one of them by the heels, the thing to do is get rid of him as soon as possible. You and old Levi have lost your wits, Helen. What if he does show a few signs of refinement? So much the worse for him. You can find every known kind of outcast among the riff-raff on these keys."

"But he is no older than I," she protested. "And I am quite sure he is harmless. Levi says he is grateful, and expressed himself in such a pretty, gentlemanly way. I don't want to adopt him, but I think we ought to take care of him until he is strong enough to work. Goodness knows we have few enough visitors, father; and I have been a meek and dutiful child in exile. Can't I have him to play with for a little while, if he passes your inspection? You can trust Levi to know 'quality folks' every time."

Mr. Eastabrook snorted.

"Helen, you are simply preposterous! You will have nothing whatever to do with this young vagabond. And I shall put him ashore at the nearest camp to-morrow. The railroad has its own hospitals, and they take the best possible care of their men."

The implacable parent moved beyond earshot, and Thomas wore a sorrowful countenance. He had heard enough to convince him that he was to be expelled from this Eden forthwith, thrown out neck and crop, and turned adrift in disgrace. Making the best of his disappointment, he said to himself, with a very wry face:

"Of course, I was going to be on my way as soon as I could toddle. I belong with Jack Hogan, and I must find him. But I don't even know the name of the key I left him on. And how am I to discover my own camp, if there are five thousand men scattered along a hundred miles of these chunks of coral? Mr. Eastabrook may know his own game, but after wrecking my nervous system he might be less hasty in kicking me into the middle of next week."

Later in the day, Levi shuffled in to inform the unwelcome guest that Mr. Eastabrook had taken his daughter for an afternoon's fishing in the launch, at which cheerless tidings Thomas said:

"I don't seem to be very popular with the family, do I? I thought perhaps Miss Helen might look in before night."

"She ain't gwine git no chance, suh. I heard him done tell her down on th' wharf to keep 'way from you entirely, an' he was pow'ful mad 'bout it, too. I reckon she has been argufyin' some mo' wid him."

"Well, then, if I am to disturb the family peace, why should I linger longer?" quoth the youth. "A day's rest and your excellent home cooking have made a new man of me, Levi. And, between us, if I can't see Miss Helen again, it is back to the galleys for mine. But I am coming back some day, don't forget to tell her that."

"You mean you gwine fly th' coop right soon, boss?"

"Yes, if you can carry me to the nearest camp in the sailboat, I'll set out this afternoon. I'm not fit for work, but I can keep moving. How about it?"

Levi scratched his head with a dubious air, and tactfully replied:

"Of cou'se, we don't aim to be dishospitable, but you ain't a regular guest, an' th' boss is sot in his ways an' hard to budge. Th' skeeters, an' bein' poor an' trustin' to pineapples for his livin' has made him techy. Mebbe he'll be mo' happier if yo' leaves him yo' regards an' yo' compliments an' has impo'tant ingagements elsewhar."

"May I write a note to Miss Eastabrook?" asked Thomas, somewhat chagrined at the negro's ready compliance.

"Suttinly, suh. Yo' manners an' yo' feelin's do you proud. Th' sailboat'll be ready when you are."

"It looks to me like a put-up job," reflected Thomas, while Levi went in search of stationery. "I am willing to bet that the father left orders to get rid of me this afternoon, while he carried her off out of range. Levi was all primed and waiting. Well, I can't help myself, but I'm coming back some day, if I have to swim for it."

It was a disconsolate exile that meekly made ready to follow Levi down to the wharf after writing a farewell in this wise:

My Dear Miss Helen Eastabrook: It is awfully nervy for a ruffian of a railroad hand to dare to address you, but you have been so good to me that I can't help telling you how much it has meant to me. As your father sized me up, I am down and out and belong with the hoboes, but I did not run away from my camp, and I had no intention of looting your house or your pineapple patch. I do think he was a little hasty in his judgment, and also reckless with his artillery, but my father is built very much the same way, and parents are sometimes rather difficult to handle, don't you think? I heard you standing up for me in great shape, and it made me feel better than finding a million dollars. You are just as good as you are beautiful, and that's about as strong as I can put it. I am ashamed to sign my real name, after making such a mess of things generally, and please believe me to be, with no end of admiration and a heart full of gratitude, yours most faithfully, until we meet again, Thomas Whittaker.

The trim little jib-and-mainsail boat had tacked clear of the channel that led past Little Spanish Key, and was footing it briskly toward the outer string of islets, when Thomas asked the natural question which had been much in his mind:

"It is none of my business, Levi, but what is Mr. Eastabrook's game? He is a Northerner, and he doesn't look as if he were down here for his health."

"Don' ask me, boss. I dunno," earnestly replied the negro. "He jes' finished fixin' th' place up las' spring, an' sot hisself down like he 'tended stayin' fo' life. I reckon he ain't got money to live anywhar else. I never asks him no fool questions."

"Where did he find you, Levi?"

"He done brung me from Key West, where I was stranded, but I was raised in ol' Virginny."

Thomas was baffled, and fell to brooding over his own unhappy problem. To be set ashore in a strange camp bereft of his right bower, Sergeant Jack Hogan, was an appalling prospect. And how was he to make his way from one key to another in search of his friend? This was even worse than being adrift in New York.

Levi was sympathetic, but orders were orders, and he was bent on finding the nearest construction camp by the shortest possible route. They had left behind them the unfrequented waters surrounding Little Spanish Key, and were nearing the open sea.

Tom Meserve scrambled to his feet, shaded his eyes, and cried out with amazement. Against the dazzling glory of blue sky and bluer water, ran a long, low line of white arches, extending from one of the keys and boldly marching, span after span, sheer toward the unbroken horizon. Massive, majestic, this great viaduct, solid and durable as the rock upon which it was builded, rose from the battering sea as a unique achievement of faith and works. Tom whistled, and cried delightedly:

"By Jupiter, isn't that magnificent? There's where I want to work, Levi. Is that viaduct finished yet?"

"No, suh, th' Long Key Viaduct ain't done, more'n half. It suttinly am a mighty piece o' wu'k. It's too fur to land you at. An' I dunno th' channel to it, nohow."

The passenger lost his elation. The sight of this superb engineering feat failed to solve the troubles of Thomas Whittaker Meserve. Levi was heading the boat for a near-by key, upon which gleamed the tents of a grading camp. Just then there appeared from behind this island the tall funnels and towering superstructure of a stern-wheeled steamer, her low-pressure exhaust panting loudly. Thomas snatched at a straw of hope, and exclaimed:

"Wait for her, Levi. If that is the *Memphis Queen,* her captain can tell me where I belong."

The sailboat shot up into the wind, and drifted in the narrow channel until the steamer was almost abreast. Then Thomas made frantic signals, and shouted so imploringly that the stern-wheeler slowed down and waited until the little craft had shot close alongside.

Crawling out on the bow, Thomas jumped for the low guard rail of the *Memphis Queen,* caught hold of a stanchion, and pulled himself aboard. Waving a hand in farewell to Levi, he climbed to the hurricane deck and hastily explained to the swarthy skipper:

"I've lost my camp, if you please; and I want to get back to it. You brought our gang down from the railroad two nights ago."

"Sure you are not a runaway?" queried the captain severely. "I like your gall in holding up my steamer. What's to prevent my chucking you overboard?"

Thomas had no answer ready, and could only plead, by way of explanation:

"I was trying to catch a booze boat, and her crew kidnapped me. I couldn't help it. If I can find my bunkie, Jack Hogan, he will tell you I am all straight."

The black-eyed mariner smote the lad on the shoulder, shoved him into the spacious wheelhouse, thrust him upon a leather-cushioned transom, and exclaimed with excitable gusto:

"So you are Tom Whittaker, are you? The whole of Upper Matacumbe Key is looking for you. And you have risen from the dead, and look most surprisingly spruce, as if the trip had done you good. Hogan was aboard last night, swearing and going on like a crazy man, begging me to take him down to Key West and back. The engineer took it to heart; and, sick as he was, he was up and aboard one of the launches yesterday. Yes, indeed, I'll take you back to your camp. If those booze runners had been overhauled, there'd ha' been a lynching bee in no time."

Thomas was completely overwhelmed. He seemed to be returning in the rôle of a hero, and he could only murmur, with tears in his eyes:

"Good old Jack. But why did they make any fuss about me?"

"Mainly because this Hogan man raised such an infernal row about it," replied the captain. "He is a powerful trouble breeder when he gets under way, and any one that didn't agree that the railroad must stop work without you was in sore danger of being hammered to a pulp. The camp is demoralized. Oh, you are a leading citizen of Camp Number Eleven by this time."

Captain Canova left his mate to handle the steamer, and commanded Thomas to relate what had befallen him, which narrative consumed so much time that the whistle bellowed for the landing before the whole had been told.

"You will have supper aboard with me next time I touch at your camp," said the captain, "and spin me the rest of the yarn about the fat gent and his beautiful daughter of Little Spanish Key. Why should I spend my good money to buy novels about dukes and castles and such, when you are chuck full of copper-fastened romance that beats anything I ever ran foul of? Come on deck, and look for your big, noisy comrade-in-arms. He will be waiting for news."

The *Memphis Queen* sidled, crab-fashion, to make her landing. A crowd of laborers swarmed to meet her, for the day's work was done, and it was the blessed cool of the early evening. At their head towered the martial fig-

ure of Sergeant John Hogan. The heart of Thomas Whittaker leaped at the sight, and, before he was within hailing distance, he was dancing to and fro, and shouting himself breathless. The camp was no longer hostile, forbidding, isolated. This was like coming home; it was where he belonged, and, although he was not old enough to know how precious a thing it was to have even one such friend as he had won in Sergeant John Hogan, nevertheless, he was supremely happy and content with his lot.

These two met on the gang plank, and Hogan was nearer blubbering than ever he had been in his iron-fisted career, as he flung an arm around his young bunkie, and shouted:

"You little divil, you! Are you all here? Didn't they murder you entirely? I have been rampagin' like a wild man, an' my heart was broke for sendin' you to your death."

"A trifle shaky, Jack; but all here," said the freshman, with a grin of purest joy. "I was unavoidably detained, but I had an awfully good run for my money. Shake the crowd, and I'll tell you all about it. Whew! But I am certainly glad to see you."

V.

The joy of Jack Hogan in the safe return of the freshman was clouded by one disturbing factor. He dubiously wagged his head over the revelation that his young comrade had discovered a girl in his recent wanderings, and, worse than this, that he blushed when she was mentioned and was unduly reticent concerning her charms.

"'Tis discouragin', an' I heartily dislike the symptoms," announced the mentor, after they had talked late into the night. "I had hopes of you, Tom, an' the petticoats was the least of my worries, for I thought there were no wimmen within gunshot of this region. An' you discover the only one of them without losin' a minute. I'll see to it that you don't find her again."

Thomas looked rebellious, and had no comment to make. It was evident that past experiences of Sergeant John Hogan had warped his vision and given him a pessimistic opinion of femininity at large. And this wise man of the world had something more to say with reference to the attractive maiden of Little Spanish Key, which comment he delivered with the air of one having a stern duty to perform:

"She may be as bewitchin' as you say, Tom—an' I take your word for it—but her old man is a bad lot. What would he be doin' under cover, tucked away on one of these God-forsaken reefs, with a system of fortifications, an' wantin' to see nobody at all? Can you tell me that? He was anxious to get rid of you, I notice. You say he is not a native. He has done somethin' that makes him almighty unpopular somewheres else."

"Then his daughter ought to be rescued from such a life," cried Tom. "And you are the very man to join me in sifting this mystery to the bottom."

"Not on your life. Wimmen are all mysteries," sagely quoth the sergeant. "An' now you're due to turn in an' sleep yourself sensible again, you ravin' lunatic."

Tom had inquired for his other tentmates, Fitzherbert and Jones, at which he was informed:

"Old Jones, the pen pusher, was drafted off to help the storekeeper, an' very glad I was, for he couldn't stand hard work. The Englishman is sweatin' with the concrete gang on the next key below, and will not be feelin' very melodious by now. You will rest up till you get your strength, Tom, an' then it's the pick and shovel for yours. No soft snaps in Professor Hogan's college course for makin' two-handed men, mind ye that."

While he idled, the freshman had his first view of that part of the gigantic construction work which included his own camp and its hundreds of hard-driven men. They were strung along the embankment of limestone that stretched across the key like a white ribbon. Behind them the trestle and solid rampart of rock rose from the open water, to link their work with

the keys to the northward. Ahead of them, other gangs were building the pathway for the steel track to carry it ever south, but the most impressive activities were focused at the great Long Key Viaduct.

Down the wide Hawk Channel passed one deep-laden tramp steamer after another, rolling home with material for this monumental structure, while there seemed to be no end to the procession of coastwise vessels, tugs, and barges, which were carrying concrete, steel, sand, and rock to Long Key.

Thomas was not surprised to find Sergeant Jack Hogan bossing a crew of laborers, who were making a section of roadbed ready for the track layers. And when he was fit to try to earn his wages, the youngster made never a "bleat" at being assigned to toil under this stern and impartial taskmaster. Hogan eyed him grimly as the sweating novice tried to ease his blistered hands, or hobbled into camp at the noon hour, bent double like a rheumatic old man. Thomas might have been less docile could he have overheard the division engineer telling Hogan the day before this:

"I know pretty well what you can do. Your army record shows that you can make yourself very useful to me. And you don't drink. Just you stick by this work, and you won't regret it. But how about this boy you have taken under your wing? I like his looks, and he has been raised as a gentleman. He is bright enough to hold down an office job. We can use him in half a dozen ways. He ought not to be drilling along with the common tarriers. Better send him up to see me, Hogan."

The sergeant saluted, and respectfully replied:

"If you please, an' don't think me impudent, Mr. Carson, but the trouble with that lad is that people have been makin' it easy for him all his life. Let him win the promotion in the sweat of his brow. Turn him over to me for a month or two. I was loony enough to fetch him down here, and I'll have to square it with his daddy some day. Let him take his medicine. It's coming to him, sir."

The engineer smiled understandingly, and had no more objection to offer. And so Thomas strove to "take his medicine" like a man, and day by day became browner and tougher and thinner, and felt that he was earning his "one seventy-five per."

Older and more muscular men fell out of his gang, and were taken to the hospital, or ran off to Key West or Miami in whatever small craft they could hire from the natives, and, after wasting their savings in dissipation, tramped north to spread more stories of the "wicked slave drivers." They were men who had no stamina; they had drunk hard and lived hard, and this test weeded out the unfit swiftly, inexorably. It put fresh heart into the stripling freshman to find that he was holding his own and was able to stand up to his work in this tropical furnace.

Whenever he became despondent because of utter weariness, Hogan was ready with a wise word or a caustic jest, nursing the boy along as a skilled rider handles a well-bred colt. Out under the velvet sky in the reviving freshness of night, the sergeant sprawled on the beach, his pipe aglow, and told amazing tales of his adventures afield and afloat, and inspired other rovers to recount how strangely the world had used them.

Thomas perceived that among these queer comrades of his there was no whining over misfortune, and that "going broke" was a commonplace incident. Their vivid narratives began with a certain formula, varied somewhat in this wise:

"When I was busted in 'Frisco that winter——"

"I was down and out, all right, and sleeping on the Bund in Shanghai."

"Vera Cruz is a tough place for a white man, with never a cent and no job, I tell you, boys."

Although these men were failures, reflected Thomas, they had a kind of invincible self-reliance that commanded

respect. They had cast out fear, and looked to-day and to-morrow in the eye without flinching.

The remembrance of his whimpering panic at the notion of facing his college debts and a reckoning with his justly indignant father filled him with a sense of shame. He had begun to realize that, after all, the campus did not hold a monopoly of the manly virtues—which serves to show that the rough-and-tumble educational theories of Sergeant Hogan were getting a grip on this pupil.

Thomas seldom talked about his misfortunes, for another thing. He did not expect to be sympathized with and coddled out of a "grouch." Unconsciously he was imitating the curt, clean-cut manner of speech of the sergeant in dealing with the men with whom they were compelled to associate, and he no longer slouched, but walked, head up, shoulders well braced. In brief, the freshman was ambitious of promotion, and aspired to be a foreman.

At length, Hogan came to him with the welcome tidings:

"We shift camp to-morrow. I'm going aboard Quarter Boat Number Ten at the Long Key Viaduct, and you are to hike along with me. It will be livin' afloat, which is better than this hell hole of a key, and I am to give you a small gang of men to boss. You've made good, you tarrapin, an' the engineer speaks well of you."

Thomas could have been no more genuinely elated had he been chosen to pitch on the Yale university nine. His face shone as he said:

"That is bully, Jack. Wait until you see the viaduct. You'll be proud to help on such a job. And I am to move up a peg? Well, I didn't flunk my exams this time, did I? Do you know, I think it is about time I wrote a letter home. They must be worried about me, and this will make them sit up."

"About time, you selfish young villain!" roared Hogan. "I should say it was. Thinkin' of yourself, an' never a thought for your mother and father! 'Tis like the sons of good men an' wimmen the world over. Write that letter to-night, or I'll black both your eyes for ye."

Thomas dutifully foraged for pencil and paper, and, while his intentions were commendable, the result was likely to prove most distressing to Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Whittaker Meserve, Sr. It never occurred to their ingenuous offspring that they would fail to understand his changed views of life, or that they might regard his success as betokening the most alarming degradation and hardship. With enthusiastic interest, he wrote as follows:

DEAR MOTHER AND FATHER: I don't quite know how to date this letter, but my next job will be at the Long Key Viaduct somewhere off the Florida coast. I have been an awful shyster to send you no word before, but Hogan wrote you from New York and told you I was right side up. Well, I made such a mess of things in college that I decided to strike out for myself and show you that I could win. Hogan brought me way down here, and he is the greatest man you ever saw in your life. We are building a railroad to Key West, right out over the salt, wet sea, five thousand of us, and I have been moving real estate with a shovel for one seventy-five per—just a common or garden tarrier.

Hogan has taught me something about handling men, and I am to be made a foreman in a small way, so you see things are coming strong for me. I got mixed up in a fight with a bunch of pirates who were trying to run whisky into our camp, and had my head cracked, but soon recovered. Since then I have licked several dagoes who got gay on the embankment, and Hogan thinks I am doing well.

I must tell you that I have met a girl who interests me very much. Not that I am really in love, but I expect to be when I see her again. This looks to me like the real thing. Her name is Helen Eastabrook, and she lives with her father on an out-of-the-way key below here. He seems to be hiding there for some reason, and came near blowing me sky-high with a gun he had planted in ambush. But she is so good and beautiful and fine that I can afford to overlook a little thing like that, and she can't be held responsible for him, anyhow.

Please do not ask me to come home now. I must stay here through next winter, or until the Long Key Viaduct is finished. I am as hard as nails, in love with the game, and stand well with my bosses. I hope you will write me, care Quarter Boat Number Ten at Long Key, but please don't interfere, will you? I suppose the horseshoe-nail factory is dead easy compared with this, but I am

satisfied and happy, so what's the odds? I am going back to college some day, and am saving my wages to pay my own way.

With love, and begging your blessing, I am, very fondly, YOUR SON.

After Thomas had mailed this lively summary of his achievements, Hogan asked what he had written to console and reassure his anxious parents. After listening to an outline of the letter, the sergeant gravely commented:

"I don't want to sound peevish, Tommy, but you have hove a bomb-shell into that peaceful, genteel mansion. From what you have told me, your family is numbered among the tame an' industrious rich who live up to the rules most particular. They lose the heir, he is mislaid in company of a rude an' awful soldier man; an' he is next heard of as a beast of burden in a railroad camp—an' proud of it! An', to drive 'em clean distracted, you have to shout it that you are in love with the daughter of an outlaw, brand unknown, an' are contemplatin' a mess-alliance that will tear your former social circles wide open. No, Tommy, your letter is divertin'; but it would take a case-hardened liar to call it soothin'. Such details as the episode of the booze boat are what you call the high lights."

"Honestly, Jack, is it as bad as that?" anxiously queried the author. "I told them the plain truth. Of course, I am going to find that girl again. And I can't believe the old man is an outlaw. He is too fat and cityfied for that."

"Bank presidents are built that way. One of 'em was pointed out to me in New York, an' he was a heap overweight," declared Jack. "Maybe this one looted the vaults and picked Little Spanish Key as the safest place to bury the gold. However, your letter has gone, an' good luck to it. Goin' by what I know about mothers—an' I had one once, an' a pig of a son I was to her—yours will be thankin' God on her knees that you are alive an' well; an' nothing else at all will matter very much."

Somewhat cheered, the freshman fell to packing his slender kit for the welcome shift of base to Long Key. It was the *Memphis Queen* which carried the working force to the new quarters afloat, and Captain Canova hailed Thomas as he marched on board, and invited him to the exclusive realm of the hurricane deck.

This master mariner of the railroad fleet was a Cuban by birth, having learned to know the waters of the Bahama and Florida keys as a fisherman, sponger, pilot, wrecker, and steamboat man. Handsome, rather vain, a good deal of the dandy in his love of fine raiment, he was not such a sailor as you would have picked to fight his way through a dangerous situation; and Sergeant Hogan, violent in his likes and dislikes, had marked down Captain Rafael Canova as a "counterfeit." The less critical Thomas was of a different mind, and frankly admired this dashing skipper who had so cordially befriended him.

"I was about to send a deck hand ashore to find you," said he, as the freshman perched himself upon the rail in front of the wheelhouse. "I had to run down to Key West for some repairs, and, coming back to-day, that old nigger in the jib-and-mainsail boat was waiting on the edge of Hawk Channel, just about where I picked you up. He made signals, and I slowed up while he tossed a letter aboard, tied to a bunch of oyster shells. I yelled at him that I wasn't running a rural delivery packet boat, but he just wagged his old gray head and batted his eyes at me, and put about for the inside channel."

"W-was the letter for me?" asked the youth, and his face was very red, indeed.

"For 'Thomas Whittaker, Esquire, care of the *Memphis Queen*,' and it wasn't a man's fist that handled the pen," quoth the gallant skipper, pulling at his black mustache and standing very erect, as if, forsooth, he was not unused to feminine attention himself. "I don't want to be cruel. Here it is."

He gave Thomas the envelope, and the young man fled aft with never a

word of apology. It was incredible that Helen Eastabrook should have sent him a letter, and he eyed the superscription as if this were a message from Mars. How wonderful of her to have thought of tracing him by means of the *Memphis Queen?* It must be in answer to his note, and she was unwilling to let it be farewell! Perhaps she had need of him.

Thomas sighed, smiled, very carefully tore open the envelope, and held the sheet of note paper by the corners lest he profane it with toil-stained fingers.

The steamer was moving out from the lee of the key, and as she turned to pick up her course past the buoys, her hull swung broadside to the whistling wind from the nor'east. A wicked gust smote Thomas unawares and whisked the precious letter from his fingers, drove it fluttering in mad career across the deck, and bore it, like a feather, through the wide meshes of the rail netting.

Overcome with woe and consternation, Thomas emitted a wild cry of anguish, dived for the rail on hands and knees, fetched up with a resounding thump, and popped over the barrier, where he hung fast to a davit and scanned the whitecapped water. The letter was drifting astern like a fleck of foam, and only the sight of the huge stern wheel, tearing the surface into thundering cataracts of spray, held him back from jumping over in chase.

His sorrowful gaze beheld the waterlogged bit of paper whirl into the suction of the wheel and vanish forever. Captain Canova had observed his mad rush across the deck, and hurried aft, conjecturing that evil tidings had driven the rash youth to suicide.

"I hadn't read a word of it, and it blew away," faltered Thomas. "I am the most unhappy man in the world."

The captain clapped his hand to his heart, and feelingly replied:

"They have made me suffer in my day. I can sorrow with you. It is the luck of the devil himself. I would lower a boat, but the love letter has vamoosed."

"It wasn't a love letter," mourned Thomas. "Not a bit of it. But it was terribly important, whatever it was. Oh, well, no use crying over spilled milk." With which he jammed his hands in his pockets, and stalked below to find Jack Hogan, suddenly recollecting that he had been sternly schooled to keep his troubles to himself. He had no intention of confessing to the sergeant, but that shrewd guardian read the signs of distress and extorted the sad story by threats of bodily violence. He was not a sympathetic confidant, however, and exclaimed, with a brutal laugh:

"What terrible trials children have, to be sure! So the wind blew all her pretty words away! 'Trifles light as air,' as the poet says, an' my old company captain used to spout him by the yard, whoever he was. 'Tis likely there will be many a shift of wind for you, an' many a face you will forget before you find the one girl that is waitin' for you."

"Oh, confound it, I am not as soft and silly as you think," angrily blurted Thomas. "Never mind, I'll get a boat and sail over to see her."

"Watch out her old man has not sowed the harbor with mines," said Hogan. "And as for your jumpin' your job to go romancin' off to find this young flyaway, you will not leave Long Key till I say the word. You are talkin' to your boss, understand."

The disgruntled freshman moved sulkily away, and chewed the cud of bitterness while the *Memphis Queen* slid over the opalescent shallows and drove the shining schools of flying fish ahead of her blunt bow. It was firmly fixed in the stubborn head of Thomas that Helen Eastabrook had sent him some message of vital moment, and that she expected him to play the part of a knight-errant. And he would be a craven, indeed, unless he responded in some way or other, with all possible haste.

At heart, he was not really vain enough to assume that she entertained any sentimental eagerness to see him again, but one dreams dreams and

builds romances at twenty, and Thomas was a normal youth. When it came to the point of disobeying Jack Hogan, however, and proving unfaithful to his trust, Thomas found himself torn two ways, and in acute distress of mind.

"I couldn't find Little Spanish Key again," he said to himself. "And if I pick up a beach comber to pilot me, Mr. Eastabrook will be madder than ever, for he doesn't want to be discovered by the natives. He put his house on the other side of the key to keep under cover. If I do try to make the trip, Hogan will never forgive me, and I lose my job. All I can do is to sit tight and watch for a chance to send her a letter. Life is certainly a complicated game, no matter how you play it."

The freshman could not be utterly downcast for long. The viaduct was visible, its arches marching along the horizon like some noble structure of the Rome of the Cæsars. As the steamer drew nearer, the manifold activities of the builders were apparent. The dry land was no more than a base of supplies. Men and machines were afloat, living and working in craft of every description.

The unique flotilla dotted the sea, suction dredges, concrete mixing plants, pile drivers, lumber scows, launches, and towboats. Moored along the shore of Long Key towered the uncouth, high-walled quarter boats of the workmen. A vast and complex construction plant had been bodily shifted to salt water, risking hazard of hurricane, no longer an army, but a navy, of toilers.

This novel aspect moved Hogan to remark:

"Now I wish I'd served my time in a battle ship instead of a rigiment. I never expected, so help me, to run the risk of bein' took seasick in buildin' a railroad. We must get our sea legs on, Tommy, an' watch the barometer. 'Tis a great sight, an' I'm glad I came."

Keenly interested, the freshman followed Hogan ashore, and carried his kit aboard Quarter Boat Number Ten, which was lying abreast the long, low sand-spit that formed the end of Long Key, somewhat sheltered by the landward arches of the viaduct.

A two-storied house had been roughly constructed upon the stout hull of a wide-beamed barge. On the top deck, or floor, were cots for a hundred and fifty men, and below were the kitchens and offices and the long messroom. The winds had full sweep through the long windows, and the boat was airy, cool, and comfortable after the sweltering ordeal of living in camp.

With soldierly promptness, Hogan posted off to report to the division engineer for orders—and perhaps to slip in a good word for his protégé—while Tom dangled his heels from a window sill, and watched the crowded yawls come creeping in from the outer end of the viaduct, bringing the laborers to their several quarter boats for supper. Hogan was so long absent that Tom joined the nearest squad and devastated the rough, hearty fare like a young giant. When the sergeant returned, his manner was as of one bearing weighty tidings. Hauling the freshman into a corner of the bunk room, he huskily confided:

"We have joined this web-footed outfit just in time. Our gang knocks off work to-morrow, for there's some trouble in sinkin' the caissons, and the rest of us are held up. Tell me, first, and tell me true, Tommy, can you pitch a good game of ball? You have mentioned your pitchin' in college, but maybe it was as bad as the rest of your record."

"I was almost good enough to make the varsity nine," sharply returned the other, somewhat nettled by this slighting reference to his prowess as an athlete. "I needed a little more steam behind my delivery, but I think my arm would have been stronger by another season. What is the row, anyhow?"

"You've been makin' muscle since I took you in tow, an' I'm not afraid of your fadin' away in the box," said Hogan good-naturedly, as he gripped the youngster's biceps. "I take your word for it that you have the curves

an' drops that's needed. To-morrow you'll pitch for your life on a team picked from the quarter boats. It will be a great occasion, Tommy."

"Do I have nothing whatever to say?" asked the freshman. "Where and what?"

"This new engineer boss of ours is a sport and a gentleman down to his heels," Hogan condescended to explain. "And he is perishin' to see a game of ball. To-morrow he will give a holiday to the good-conduct men afloat and ashore, meanin' them as has stayed sober an' can be trusted to behave. 'Tis a special reward of merit. There's some ballplayers in the shore camp on Long Key, an' they've challenged us webfoots on the boats. It seems that we are shy on pitchin' talent. I heard the lamentations of the bunch, an' shoved you in the breach —an' there you are. What's a college education good for, I want to know?"

"But we can't play on these keys. There isn't a patch of ground fit to lay out a diamond, much less an outfield," cried Thomas, his eyes dancing with the light of battle.

"The *Memphis Queen* will carry the crowd to Key West, Tommy. The engineer has already engaged the grounds that belong to the black-and-tans that call themselves the Cuban Giants. All hands are bettin' their wages, an' if you're licked, you'd better step overboard an' swim north with the Gulf Stream."

Thomas began to feel symptoms of dismay, and hastily asked to be led to the captain of the quarter-boat nine, who was discovered on the beach, seeking to muster his men. He was a stocky, alert-looking person, no longer young, who introduced himself as Tim McFarland, of Dredge Number Six.

"Tim McFarland!" echoed Thomas, as they shook hands. "Why, it can't be! I read baseball news when I was knee high—and there was a Tim McFarland—the great shortstop of the Chicago league team."

"Which the same is yours truly," grinned the gray-haired gladiator. "What do you think they do with has-been ballplayers—chloroform 'em? I had to make a living somehow after I lost my batting eye and got stiff in the joints. Foreman Hogan tells me you can pitch a few. The colleges play some good ball nowadays. Well, well, we have signed a great collection of discards for this game to-morrow. You can find almost any kind of a handy man in this outfit of hoboes."

Thomas looked solemn. This promised to be faster company than he relished, and he asked the natural question:

"How about the other team, Mr. McFarland? Who will pitch for them? You have me scared. Any more old professionals?"

The old shortstop winked mischievously, as he replied: "Nothing very classy, barring the slab artist of the 'Sand Fleas,' as they call themselves. His name is Terry Flynn. He was a good one in his day, but rum threw him down hard, and he stayed down. He looks like a soak now, but he may have one good game in him. The last time I saw him in action was in the old Atlantic League."

At this news the freshman fairly gasped. Then this was to be no farce of a holiday contest. But he was not going to let Tim McFarland think him a coward, and he nonchalantly observed:

"I might have known that there were first-class ballplayers in such a crowd of men as this—all kinds, from everywhere. Where is my catcher? We might limber up a bit before dark. This is a fine, hard strip of beach."

McFarland beckoned a red-faced, battered person, who was chatting with a group of loafers sprawled out on a pile of timber, and remarked:

"The battery, gentlemen. Whittaker and Jenks. Clear the beach, and watch 'em give you an imitation of Kelly and Clarkson at their best."

Mr. Jenks, who was a taciturn individual, produced a ball from inside his shirt, and made ready to receive the bombardment barehanded. The freshman pitcher gained confidence after a few minutes' practice, and was rejoiced

to find that he could command more speed and accuracy that he had dared hope for. The catcher made wry faces and delayed to nurse his fingers, while Tim McFarland beamed encouragingly, and exclaimed:

"Not so bad for a kid, eh, Jenks? Better wait till I can buy you a glove in Key West. The Sand Fleas will be kept guessing, just a few."

Thomas returned to Quarter Boat Number Ten in high feather, and wisely decided to go early to bed and leave Hogan to his own devices. He was sitting on the edge of his cot, gazing admiringly at the wonderful panorama of sea and sky framed by the nearest window, when the sergeant tramped in, and earnestly declaimed:

"The Sand Fleas are comin' aboard to make a friendly call an' show there's no hard feeling. You'll have to buck up an' meet 'em, Tommy. They're good fellows, save for Terry Flynn, the pitcher. He's talkin' loud an' huntin' trouble, an' he aims to shake your nerve. Don't mix it up with him, understand. You have plenty of friends. This Flynn is bad medicine, they tell me."

The wondering freshman followed Hogan downstairs to the messroom, just as the visitors clattered aboard, making a good-natured commotion and loudly declaring their intention of whitewashing the "Quarter Boats" on the morrow.

The reception was cordial and noisy; and Tim McFarland, after a whispered conference with the steward, showed himself to be an admirable host by setting forth a bottle of iced beer per man.

Tom had prudently sought shelter beside Hogan, and presently there swaggered toward them a tall, loose-jointed, surly-looking stranger, who said, with a sneering laugh:

"Is this the —— —— college stiff we're going to knock out of the box? Say, boys, pipe him off. Oh, what a —— —— cinch. I'll bet you don't last three innings, Willie."

The comrades of Terry Flynn, quick to resent his flagrant discourtesy as a guest of the Quarter Boats, yelled to him to keep his mouth shut; but he persisted in hurling more foul-mouthed taunts at the youthful pitcher, whose face had grown very white.

Hogan was grasping his arm, and whispering: "I know you want to land on him, an' I'd like to see you kill him, but don't do it. He's a dog. Don't dirty your hands. Softly, Tommy, dear. Wait till after the game."

The freshman's eyes were full of tears, and his lip quivered as he begged Hogan to release him. McFarland stepped forward, disgust written in every line of his rugged countenance, clutched Terry Flynn by the collar, whirled him around with a terrific thrust and heave, then deliberately, methodically, kicked him to the door and down the gang plank.

"I beg your pardon for doing your work," said McFarland, breathing hard, as he returned to confront the Sand Fleas. "But I seemed to be called upon to 'tend to the job."

"Right you are," cried the captain of the visitors. "I aimed to throw him out myself, but you moved faster. Please forget it, will you? We're sorry and ashamed. If he gets gay again, we'll tame him down a whole lot."

The Sand Fleas withdrew rather awkwardly, and poor Thomas, finding opportunity to flee the crowd, marched off to his cot and slumped down, his face in his hands, sobbing aloud:

"I was making good on a man's job until now. And I stood up and let him call me vile names, and never put my hands on him. What will the men think? Oh, what will they think? And I have queered myself as a foreman, and nobody will have any respect for me."

Hogan had followed him, and stood beside the cot, saying nothing for some time. Then, as Tom looked up, his friend told him:

"You did the right thing. If you have to use your fists in the line of duty, 'tis well an' good, an' I expect to see you fight till you drop. But you're here to help me enforce discipline on Quarter Boat Number Ten.

An' we'll have no barroom brawls aboard. The other men respected you, an' you haven't queered yourself. The disgrace is with the Sand Fleas for bringin' Terry Flynn with 'em. I would have smashed him meself, but I will not have any one think I fight your battles for you. You have stood on your own two feet till now, an' you've no reason to take on so."

"But—but he insulted me," wailed Thomas.

"He insulted nobody but himself an' his friends, my boy. Your ball team will play for blood to-morrow because of this blackguard Terry Flynn. Outpitch him, Tommy. That's how you must break even for to-night's ruction."

"Just you watch me, Jack. You have made me feel a lot better, thank you," and Thomas actually smiled. "I'll take the game away from him if it kills me."

VI.

The *Memphis Queen* was veering into the harbor of Key West, her decks crowded with tanned, rugged men, who were cheering and singing and raising such a hullaballoo in general that the natives swarmed to the water front in unwonted excitement.

The saloons hastily prepared for a thirsty onslaught, the gamblers made their layouts ready for swift action, and the hackmen drove their bony steeds toward the wharves in hot haste. There must have been a pay day on the keys, surmised this hospitable populace, which had found the railroad laborers highly profitable visitors.

This was a novel invasion, however. Four hundred men had been given a holiday excursion, with conditions attached, and they intended to make a record for sobriety and respectability. Sergeant Jack Hogan had been appointed provost marshal, and he selected a dozen hard-fisted, muscular aids, whose orders were to drag disorderly members of the party down to the *Memphis Queen,* and lock them up in a spare cabin.

Tom Meserve had not slept as soundly as usual. This was more like war than baseball, in his fluttered opinion, and it was nothing short of cruel to pitchfork him without warning into a game which, as likely as not, might wind up with more broken heads than base hits. The trip to Key West in the steamer was not reassuring. The rival clans carried banners, hastily made of sail cloth, and stenciled by an artist of the repair shop with the spirited devices:

QUARTER BOATS FOREVER.

Our Motto,

WE EAT 'EM ALIVE!

SIC 'EM, SAND FLEAS!

Watch Us Hop.

EVERYTHING GOES BUT MANSLAUGHTER!

The terrible Terry Flynn had been tamed for the time, but he took occasion to pass Thomas at close range on the deck of the *Memphis Queen,* and scowled with the ferocity of a cannibal chief marking down a particularly juicy victim. It was a trying situation for a "college kid," as he had been dubbed by his comrades of the quarter-boat nine, but the freshman kept his nerve and refused to listen to the bantering sympathy of Hogan.

The steamer was almost alongside the wharf at Key West, her whistle raising a dir of jubilant greeting, when a deck hand ran after Tom Meserve and asked him to report to the captain in a hurry.

As Thomas scampered past the wheelhouse, Captain Canova appeared from the starboard side, waved both his arms in an eloquent flourish, and with a loud, "Ha! ha!" of triumph indicated a small launch, which was tied to a floating stage near the landward end of the long wharf. Bending over her engine was a venerable

negro, and ever and anon he rubbed his head and made violent motions of anger and impatience.

There was no mistaking Levi, of Little Spanish Key, and with never a word of thanks to the captain, Thomas sped madly to the lower deck, bounded to the wharf, and bore down upon the launch with headlong ardor.

All thought of baseball was flung to the winds. The most urgent business on hand was to interview Levi. The freshman's heart jumped at the bare possibility that Helen Eastabrook might be somewhere ashore, but this was, of course, too good to be true.

Levi looked up at the sound of scurrying feet, and grinned amiably at sight of his master's unwelcome guest. He was given no time to frame a suitable greeting, for Thomas fetched up at the edge of the landing stage, with a loud cry of:

"Good old Levi, you look handsomer than a million dollars! Forget your fussy little engine and listen to me. I want you to carry a letter to Miss Helen, sure. I don't suppose—that is—hem—she didn't come—you left her well, I hope?"

"I didn't lef' her, at all," said Levi, after straightening his aching back, with a quavering groan. "She jes' now lef' me to wrastle with this yere fool injine. She went uptown to buy some goods at th' sto'."

"What? Is her father with her?" The demeanor of Thomas was much less bold.

"No, suh, he ain't never come to Key West yit. He's pow'ful shy thataway."

"Which way did she go? Where can I find her?" The questions were fairly hurled at Levi's head.

"I reckon you can't lose her if youse sot on meetin' up with her, Mistah Whittaker. You can't walk more'n a hunderd an' 'leven steps in Key Wes' without prancin' overboa'd, whichever street yo' take."

"Well, if I miss her, you wait here and I'll come back," shouted Thomas, as he bolted, with head down, not into the nearest alley, but plump into the waiting arms of Provost Marshal Jack Hogan, who sternly declaimed:

"All stragglers and deserters to be rounded up at once, an' no mercy shown 'em. I couldn't help hearin' your farewell to the accommodatin' old colored gentleman that has gone adrift from 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' Right about face. You *will* miss her, 'tis a safe bet."

"But this is the very girl herself! I must see her. Great heavens, Jack, it is my only chance. Don't be so bullheaded. Let me explain." Thomas was squirming to escape, but his brutal captor held him at arm's length, and replied, with righteous indignation and inexorable firmness:

"If necessary, I will turn out the guard to lug ye to the baseball field, feet first. The team is hustlin' out there to practice, right away, quick. 'Tis no time to lose yourself an' your wits flyin' after a petticoat. Have I hammered no discipline into you at all, Thomas?"

"I swear I'll take no more than a few minutes. If you can't be reasonable, I won't pitch, that's all," sputtered the outraged freshman. "Please, Jack. I want to explain that lost letter."

"An' if she asks you to sit down in the shade of a cocoanut tree while she tells you the sad story of her life, you'll fight no harder than so much putty, Tommy, lad. But, seein' as you're plumb distracted, I'll be weak enough to compromise. I will go with ye an' find the charmer, an' I'll hold my watch while you turn red an' fall over your feet, an' pass the time of day with her in a weak, falterin' voice. 'Twas years an' years ago I had the symptoms, but I remember 'em well."

There was nothing to do but accept these humiliating terms, for to combat the purpose of Jack Hogan was as futile as ramming a brick wall headforemost.

Very sheepishly, and in sullen silence, the freshman trudged beside his keeper, and swept the landscape with vigilant scrutiny, in hope of sighting Helen Eastabrook. When he spied her, she

was coming toward the water front, and Thomas muttered pettishly:

"Now, break away, Jack. I'll be good, and when you whistle I'll say *adios* to her, honestly. You certainly do make me tired."

The admirer advanced, with outward boldness, tacked across the street, and was made no easier in his mind at hearing Hogan exhort him, in a hoarse murmur:

"Throw out your chest an' turn out your toes. You're all caved in."

Miss Helen Eastabrook stood stock still, gallantly recovered from her genuine surprise, and was charmingly self-possessed, as she smiled in recognition of this tall, tanned, fair-haired youth, who cried before they had met:

"My, but I am glad to see you. This must be my lucky day."

"I seldom come to Key West, and I suppose you do not feel like making another call at Little Spanish Key," said she. "I hope you understood my letter. I tried to explain some things. I wasn't satisfied to have you think us so heartless and barbarous."

"I thought you behaved most beautifully, Miss Eastabrook. You were an angel, and—and——"

Her eyes mirrored merriment as she broke in to say:

"And father was Old Nick himself, but you are too polite to put it that way. He *is* trying at times. But you can forgive him, I am sure, after what I told you in my letter."

"Your letter, yes, indeed," stammered the freshman, fairly cornered. "The trouble is, I got it, but—but I never read it. You see——"

The chin of Helen Eastabrook was suddenly tilted. She looked straight before her, and murmured in freezing accents:

"You thought it not worth while reading. Oh, dear, what a waste of time. I am utterly crushed. I am sure I can't be worth while talking to. I bid you good day, Mr. Whittaker."

"It blew away. I was clean broken-hearted. I nearly jumped overboard after it. Give me a chance; oh, don't let's have such a dreadful misunderstanding," implored the culprit, marching doggedly at her elbow. "Won't you write it over again? I am at the Long Key Viaduct, now. I have been thinking of you so much that I——"

"I don't care to have your opinion of me shouted all over Key West," was her scathing interruption. "That big, blue-shirted man across the street is listening and making queer motions with his arms. Is he one of your friends?"

Thomas glared daggers at the restless provost marshal, recalled his duty to the Quarter Boat nine, and feebly answered:

"Yes, the best friend I ever had; but he is an awful bully. I have come down here to pitch in a baseball game this afternoon between teams of our men. Hogan, yonder, wants to drag me off for practice."

Miss Helen was instantly diverted, and exclaimed with impulsive eagerness:

"Isn't that fine? Do you know, I have not seen a good baseball game in ages and ages—not since I went with father to the Yale-Harvard game in New York a year ago. Where did you learn to pitch?"

Thomas winked hard, felt his face wax hotter and hotter, and almost revealed his own secret. Shame held him back from making a clean breast of it; but he could not help telling her, anxious as he was to be considered no ordinary brand of hobo:

"Oh, I played a little in college; but I didn't stay there long."

"There! I was sure you had been to college," she cried, with an air of triumph. "I argued with father up and down, and Levi backed me loyally. I listened outside to every word you said, and your remarks were so delightfully slangy."

"Um! Speaks well for college education, doesn't it?" commented Thomas. "This game will not resemble a Yale-Harvard contest. It promises to be a fine imitation of Donnybrook Fair. Otherwise, I should invite you to see it."

"Couldn't I drive out in a carriage

with Levi on the front seat as chaperon?" was her exceedingly rash suggestion. "Really, I am on a spree today, and ready for desperate enterprises."

"I don't know." Thomas shook his head. "Perhaps you might drive 'way down in the outfield, far away from the crowd. My friend Hogan will see that nobody goes near you. But I am afraid——"

Hogan could be patient no longer. Advancing with a most determined air, his hat in his hand, he bowed low, and sweetly observed:

"I hate myself for intrudin', for I'd not blame any young man for walkin' a thousand miles to have a word with you, miss; but the call of duty is trumpetin' loudly for this Thomas lad, an' I shrink from makin' a scene of violence. Play ball! Remember the motto of the Quarter Boats, 'We eat 'em alive.'"

This voluble manifesto was received in dead silence. Thomas was so taken aback that he failed to find words to express emotions of any kind; and, with a blundering, incoherent kind of adieu, he was wafted from the presence of the amazed Helen, who said to herself, and her smile deserved Hogan's eulogy:

"There goes one man I should like to have father meet. It would be a famous bump. He has the poor boy as tame as a kitten, there is no doubt about that. And, if Levi will let me, I am going to see that baseball game."

To the almost hysterical expostulations of Thomas Whittaker Meserve, the sergeant paid no heed; but hurried him across the island of Key West in a forced march, and safely delivered him to Captain Tim McFarland of the Quarter Boat nine with the concise order:

"Take him an' keep him. He is more worry than a squad of recruits."

An hour of hard practice made the freshman forget that life had any other interest than baseball, and the loud praise of his fellow athletes gave him courage and confidence. As the hour of the game drew near, the spectators mustered beneath their respective banners, and marched defiantly into the grand stand, the hostile groups eying each other with great contempt.

Larger crowds may have flocked to cheer contesting nines upon this tropic diamond, but certain it is that partisanship had never flamed more hotly than among this stalwart assemblage.

A Cuban player of local fame had been persuaded to take his life in his hands and essay the rôle of umpire. It was observed that his complexion became almost bleached after a hasty survey of the onlookers, and he pleaded a sudden engagement elsewhere in accents that were slightly tremulous. There was no sympathy with his evident eagerness to dodge his responsibilities, and he advanced to his post of duty with the air of a patriot insurgent about to be led out and riddled by a Spanish firing party. Before this unfortunate umpire could cock an expert eye at the first ball pitched, a tumultuous Sand Flea roared in stentorian tones:

"I don't believe he's game, boys. We want nobody passing judgment on our world beaters unless he has sand in his craw. Let's try him out."

With this, the orator flourished a revolver and banged away at the official, and at least a score of shouting Sand Fleas instantaneously did likewise, unlimbering their artillery with admirable promptness in a crackling fusillade. The umpire delayed not for argument, but sped toward the nearest gate in a series of frantic leaps. When last seen, he was careering along the highway in full cry, profaning the air with strange Spanish oaths.

"What did I tell you?" queried the Sand Flea before mentioned. "I told you he wasn't game. He might have known we were only wasting blank cartridges, but he was too scared to figger it out. Now, before we play ball, we want a real umpire, and that goes."

There ensued much loud wrangling, and it was perceived that coralling another unbiased native would be no easy task. In fact, it was reasonable to assume that Key West baseball talent

would be considerably gun-shy. At length, there emerged from the press of disputants a chunky, broad-shouldered, red-headed person, who hitched up his khaki breeches with the air of a sailor man, and observed in thunderous tones:

"My name is Mitchell. I don't belong with either gang of you. I was workin' in Bahia Honda camp, and I came down here and blew my wages and went busted. Being in need of a ten-spot, I'll take a chance of your murderin' me, and I'll umpire this ball game. If you don't like my decisions, I'll be ready to take you on, two at a time, after the ninth inning. How about it?"

"Hooray for old Red-top. You're the stuff!" shouted the approving audience. "Mitchell is good enough for us."

This valiant volunteer strode to the home plate, rolled up his sleeves, tilted a battered straw hat over one eye, and growled between his teeth:

"Batter up!"

Meanwhile, the Quarter Boats nine had taken the field. The freshman pitcher was the youngest of them all, a trim, lithe figure of a lad, clad in white ducks and a sleeveless shirt, his blond head bare. He looked around at his comrades. They wore no uniforms, but even in their stained, patched working garb their aspect was reassuring. Most of them handled themselves like ballplayers, and they faced the uproarious, menacing grand stand with stolid indifference.

Thomas Whittaker Meserve glanced beyond the field, this time with wistful eagerness, but there was never a sign of a lady fair, and he turned to face the first batter, realizing how insane it was to expect to see Helen Eastabrook.

Crack! The tall third baseman of the Sand Fleas smote the ball, and drove it screaming at shortstop, a clean hit but for Tim McFarland, the "has been," who dived after it, achieved a miracle of a catch, and whipped the ball across the diamond with the finished ease and certainty of an artist.

One out, and Thomas thanked his lucky star for the heartening support of the veteran shortstop, who was capering a war dance for joy that his skill had not forsaken him.

The next man up was Terry Flynn, the Sand Flea pitcher; and, remembering his blackguardly behavior of the night before, the crew of Quarter Boat Number Ten rose, and bellowed:

"Soak him one in the ribs, kid!"

"Make a monkey of him!"

"He is a quitter! You can scare the nerve out of him!"

Thomas smiled, and shook his head; but he felt a gusty wave of anger at the very sight of Flynn, and was in danger of losing his hard-won self-control.

Tim McFarland may have guessed that the youth was agitated, for he walked leisurely toward him, and muttered:

"Steady, boy. Don't go up in the air. Take your time. Toss the ball across the diamond. Get busy with your shoe laces. Don't let that mucker rattle you."

Grateful for this sage advice, Tom pulled himself together, carefully studied the pose of the waiting batter, and signaled Jenks, the catcher, who spat through his mask and grinned his assent. The ball went wide of the plate, and Terry Flynn looked bored and scornful, as he growled:

"Afraid I'll hit it, eh? Just give me one little chance."

The slouching demeanor of Mr. Flynn vanished after the second ball, which had both speed and curve, and plenty of both. It swerved across the corner of the plate, and the catcher grunted as it smote his glove.

"One strike!" roared the dauntless umpire.

"Rum has spoiled his eye," loudly observed Sergeant Hogan, who let no chance for a temperance preachment escape him. "If he was properly tanked up, he might see two balls and hit one of them. But he has no chance at all."

This truthful comment vexed Mr. Flynn, and he was a trifle distracted, which Thomas was quick to note. He

would strike out this blatant ruffian. He felt singularly confident, and his movements were calm and deliberate as he gripped the ball with sinewy fingers and swung his arm with every bit of strength at his command.

Flynn's bat swished viciously, but he was an instant too late, and the umpire, forgetting his neutral position, cried joyfully:

"Two strikes! Good for the tow-headed lad!"

Sand Fleas and Quarter Boats were silent. It was comprehended that the two actors in this thrilling duel had a personal issue at stake, and a rude, yet chivalrous, sense of fair play made the rivalry of the game itself forgotten for the moment.

Tom was no longer afraid of Flynn, which discovery pleased and surprised him, and held him steady as a rock for the finish of the ordeal. Of course, it seemed absurd to believe that he, a freshman player, should assume to strike out this league veteran; but, nevertheless—thud! He had hurled a wicked missile of an inshoot into the sure hands of Jenks, and Flynn had let it pass him without trying for it.

"Three strikes! Batter out," howled the umpire.

Flynn dashed his bat to the ground, wheeled, and, glaring blackly at the self-reliant official, began to say:

"That a strike? You robber, I'll show——"

Picking up the discarded bat, Mr. Mitchell stepped forward, not in a flurried fashion, but very rapidly, and poked the critic in the stomach so that he sat down abruptly, and was too busy gasping for breath to venture further comments.

"The next time you let out one whisper, you will get the thick end of a bat behind the ear; and your team will find another pitcher, see?" said the umpire.

The Sand Fleas protested at having their star performer crippled, but subsided as soon as Terry Flynn hobbled to the bench and showed interest in the incidents of the game.

The elation of Thomas was somewhat tempered by a two-bagger, neatly achieved by the captain of the Sand Fleas; but the inning ended with no runs made, and excitement already at high-water mark.

Now, it was the turn of Terry Flynn to wreak a masterly revenge, and he had so far recovered from the umpire's forceful admonition that he prevented the Quarter Boats from scoring, and had the peculiar satisfaction of throwing Thomas out after a puerile attempt at a bunt.

After four innings, during which several fielding errors and timely hitting yielded runs for both teams, the score seesawed into the seventh, where it was tied at 6—6.

Never in his baseball career at college had the freshman pitched with so much cool-headed efficiency. Nor was his endurance flagging. Terry Flynn, the terrible, was showing signs of wear and tear; yet, the skill and strategy, bred of long experience as a professional, enabled him to extricate himself from tight corners, and to baffle the amateurs who faced him.

Tom Meserve was trudging over to the bench after pitching a strenuous inning, when no fewer than three carriages entered the gate and halted at some distance from the crowd. He rubbed his eyes, for he had fondly hoped to see no more than one. Presently, several gentlemen of solid, prosperous appearance alighted, and waited while one of their number assisted a young woman of engaging beauty and escorted her to a station near the outfield.

Thomas gasped at recognizing Helen Eastabrook, attended by this distinguished-looking bodyguard, and was wholly puzzled. His confusion was made worse when Hogan came down from his perch, and brought this information:

"Our engineer boss at Long Key has gone over to meet them. I heard him say it was the president and the general manager of the road, and the chief engineer of construction, with other big bugs. 'Tis an inspection party. They have just come down over the keys in

the president's yacht. Now, play ball, or you lose your job."

"Ball be hanged! What in the world! What—what is *she* doing with them?" implored Thomas, his eyes fairly bulging. *"Who is she?"*

Ever ready with a hair-trigger solution to any problem, Hogan promptly answered:

"Easy enough, Tommy. They knew her father before he looted the bank, an' they are tryin' to extract the dark secret from her. Where is he at? 'Tis a most distressful accident for her that she met up with 'em at all, you may be sure. Maybe they are holdin' her as a hostage, I dunno. But it is more'n half likely. I told you he was a fat outlaw. An' the poor girl is discovered!"

"Oh, bosh, Jack! The mystery is thicker than ever. Heavens! it is my next turn at bat, and I am clean up in the air."

In a fog of surprise and bewilderment, Thomas strode to the plate, helpless to hit anything smaller than a toy balloon, and gazing at Terry Flynn with an absent, foolish smile. That he miserably struck out goes without saying, and, as he slunk back to the bench, the angry voice of Hogan hissed in his ear:

"I'm ashamed of you. I thought I was makin' a man of you, you whimperin', useless lump! An' the girl had her two eyes on you, waitin' for that home run she expects you to make for love of her. Get to it!"

The word had been passed through the grand stand that the group of sedate gentlemen standing at the edge of the field comprised the highest officials of the railroad and the construction work, and the untamed crowd would have been diverted to hear the general manager say to the division engineer who greeted him:

"We happened to come across a wild-eyed Cuban, who looked as if he had run himself to death. He was delivering an oration in front of a cigar store, and we gathered from his incoherent remarks that he had been trying to umpire a game between teams from the keys. So we drove out to see the fun. Any blood spilled, so far?"

"No; the men are behaving beautifully, sir. They are a picked lot, and really they had earned a holiday spree. Would you care to take seats in the stand? The finish of this game is likely to be a corker."

The general manager turned to the white-haired president, and asked:

"How about making ourselves comfortable, and getting a better view? This is baseball worth coming to see. I didn't know we had so much talent in the camps."

The president's eyes twinkled, and he needed no urging; but he looked at Helen Eastabrook as he replied:

"Do you think the language will sound precisely conventional at close range?"

The division engineer took it upon himself to reply:

"I'll answer for the men, sir. The sight of the lady herself will be enough."

As the party moved toward the grand stand, the general manager asked:

"By the way, who is the youngster pitching for the Quarter Boat gang? I don't remember seeing him in camp. What is he doing?"

"He reported to me only yesterday. Carson sent him down from Upper Matacumbe with a note advising me to push him ahead. He is chumming with a first-rate foreman—Hogan, an old regular army sergeant."

They were passing behind third base, and Hogan chanced to be helping coach a fleet-footed quarter boat runner who had just slid from second in a cloud of dust. The division engineer lowered his voice, and went on: "Here is Hogan, now—the big chap in the blue shirt. He can tell you all about the pitcher."

"I'll see him after the game. What is the name of the lad, do you happen to know?"

"Whittaker, he calls himself, sir."

"Um-m! I was about to send an order to have him looked up." The general manager delayed long enough

to take a letter from his pocket and read it hastily, after which he remarked:

"Thomas Whitttaker Meserve, Jr., is the young man I am requested to find. This is from his father. I am to ship him home to be spanked. Glad I don't have to do the spanking. He looks as hard as nails."

Now Hogan, absorbed in his noisy task, heard none of this conversation, but there followed a brief lull, and he did overhear Miss Helen Eastabrook exclaim in most indignant accents:

"I think it is a perfect shame. It is worse than that. Outrageous, I call it. No matter what he has done, he ought to be let alone. This is treating him like a criminal. Really, I feel obliged to intercede. He is trying to atone for his past, and is as manly as can be about it."

The little group moved on, while the general manager, quite taken aback, apologized for stirring up such a tempest and asked how in the world this fair accuser happened to be interested in the fortunes of the attractive derelict.

Hogan, however, heard nothing of the explanation, and jumped to the natural conclusion that Miss Eastabrook had been pleading in behalf of her father. The sergeant sorrowfully wagged his head and muttered to himself:

"I told you so. I was right on the very first guess. The big boss knows the dark secret, an' the poor girl is worried distracted for fear he will pry the old man loose from his hidin' place. And she was beseechin' him to have mercy. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! This will be cruel news for Tommy. I will hold it up for now. So the fat pirate is busy keepin' out of jail. There's a proper father-in-law for you! Another bombshell for the gilded mansion in Cleveland."

Ignorant of this harrowing revelation, Thomas went in to pitch just as the visitors climbed to an empty corner of the grand stand. The Sand Fleas had gained a lead of one run, and the game was in the eighth inning.

The freshman's wits were somewhat confused, for he could not get away from the "girl proposition," and he gave two bases on balls before settling down to pitch a whirlwind finish. Then the Sand Fleas fell upon him with wicked onslaught, and drove out three hits, which brought home two runs before the bombardment was checked.

Thomas was perspiring and wilted, as he sought Tim McFarland and begged him to pitch out the final inning.

"Nonsense, you aren't dead yet," exclaimed the veteran. "This crowd of ours expects you to pull this game out, and God help you if you don't! Terry Flynn is about due to blow up. His knees are shaky. Don't lose your sand."

The familiar word stung the freshman to the quick. "Sandless" was what he had been in college, and the lack of "sand" had made him a fugitive. Unwittingly, Tim McFarland had said precisely the right word in due season.

Thomas chewed his lip, and sat with fists clinched, while McFarland, by way of showing that he practiced what he preached, strolled to the plate, gripped his bat with nonchalant bearing, and promptly whanged the ball into deep right field for two bases. The Quarter Boats stamped and roared, and the flimsy grand stand creaked and swayed.

The standard bearer charged onto the field, and displayed the terrifying legend which the stormy partisans chanted in deep-throated unison:

"WE EAT 'EM ALIVE!"

The coaches bellowed and shook their fists, earnestly striving to avoid epithets that might shock a lady's ears; but breathing sudden death and destruction, nevertheless. Luck and a brief panic among the infielders gleaned two runs for the Quarter Boats, and the eighth inning ended with the Sand Fleas one run ahead.

Thomas dared not look for some sign of recognition from Helen Eastabrook. He had failed at everything else he had ever undertaken, and it looked as if he were to be whipped, even as a baseball player.

Hogan gripped his hand as the Quarter Boats were about to take the field for the first half of the ninth inning, and whispered:

"You admired me, Tommy, the first day we met, because the harder I fell the higher I bounced. 'Tis goin' to be the same with you. I have tried to show you, all this time, that a good man is never licked till his friends have to send for the undertaker."

The freshman smiled, swallowed a lump in his throat, and took his position, ready for his last opportunity to show his mettle as a pitcher in this contest that seemed so vital to him.

Fortunately, the Sand Fleas had worked toward the tail end of their batting list in the preceding inning, and there were no old professionals to match their cunning against his skill.

To the honest amazement of Thomas, he struck out two men with automatic precision, but he was not yet out of the woods. The left-fielder juggled an easy fly for a harrowing instant, and dropped it. Then Thomas himself slipped, and fell, in trying to scoop up a bunt, and two runners were on the bases. It was even more disconcerting to have the umpire call "four balls" on the next batter, and the bases were filled.

Now came the terrible Terry Flynn to the plate, and the immortal Casey himself appeared no more insultingly confident of making nothing short of a clean home run. Sand Fleas and Quarter Boats had swarmed out of the grand stand, and were crowding, jostling toward the base lines. The din was deafening. The umpire was as calm as a May morning, but he clutched a heavy bat, and was prepared to sell his life dearly.

The pitcher glanced at the bases and at the capering, yelling runners, who were shaking their fists at him. Flynn grinned derisively, and asked the freshman to toss it over before he fainted dead away.

A few moments later, Tim McFarland was murmuring, in a dazed kind of fashion:

"Three balls and two strikes, and the bases filled. And a doctor once told me my heart was weak. If I live through this, I'll telegraph him he is seven kinds of a liar."

The emotions of Thomas Whittaker Meserve, Jr., were beyond all analysis. He pitched the crucial ball, and Terry Flynn hit it. Thomas intuitively threw up his right hand, felt a cruel stab of pain, saw the ball fall at his feet, blindly dived for it, and flung it at first base. Terry Flynn was thrown out by a hair's breadth, and the peril was past. The pitcher fought off the rampant Quarter Boats, who were thumping him breathlessly.

"Go easy," he implored, "I broke two fingers; but it was worth it."

"I never thought you could stop it. That ball was due to keep on going till it hit salt water," said McFarland. "We'll carry you to a doctor in a jiffy."

"Not until you bat this game out," said Tom. "Now you have got to win it."

He sat down, feeling weak and unstrung, while Hogan, a rough-and-ready surgeon of no small skill, investigated the damaged fingers, and improvised a splint.

"I am afraid I can't go to bat this time," mourned the freshman.

"But you made baseball history for the island of Key West," was Hogan's cheerful comment. "For once in my life, I would ha' ducked if that ball you stopped had been aimed my way. The big boss himself saw you do it, an' there will be no trouble about your layin' off to mend your fingers. I will not mention the girl. 'Tis not the proper time."

Thomas was about to ask why, but the Quarter Boats were ready for action, with two runs to make to win in the last half of the ninth inning.

"I was hoping to make a home run, and be a real hero in a neck-and-neck finish," sighed the cripple. "But Tim McFarland will have to wind it up with one of his famous, old-time sensations."

The nerves of Terry Flynn had been severely taxed, and he was a pitcher that had gone too often, not to the well,

but to the keg. Victory had seemed certain until the freshman turned the tide earlier in this final inning. Now the issue was in doubt, and Flynn was not the man to fight his way out of a desperate situation. He had been outpitched and out-played by the despised "college kid," and his confidence in himself was shaken. The Quarter Boats hated him to a man, and he had lost the respect of most of his own comrades. As if they had fathomed his forebodings that his Waterloo impended, the batters went after his delivery with savage, cheerful energy, taking long chances, reaching for balls that they ought to have let alone, hammering out long flies, sizzling grounders, deadly drives across the infield, a veritable fusillade. The pitcher had gone to pieces in the last ditch, and, although his fellows stood up nobly under fire, and fielded really better than they knew how, the game had been wrested from their hands.

As if it had been foreordained, Tim McFarland made the spectacular home run, which rang down the curtain and made the doughty Quarter Boats handsomely victorious.

Thomas had been nursing his aching fingers, regretting that he could have no part in this joyful finale, and wondering how he might have a word with Helen Eastabrook. Alas! he was only a humble laborer in a vast army of such, and it would be rash presumption for him to venture to address her in the presence of her high-and-mighty escort.

This depressing train of thought was abruptly derailed when the tumultuous crowd of quarter boat men came rushing toward him like a landslide, the members of the nine in the van, and acclaimed him as the hero of the engagement. They were for hoisting him upon their shoulders, but McFarland yelled:

"Don't jolt him, boys. No rough house. He is bunged up."

"Then we'll carry him to town all shipshape and elegant," shouted somebody else; and there was a scramble for the fence, a section of which was plucked up by the roots. Strong arms carried this spacious litter; a dozen coats were flung upon the planks, and, with no chance to protest, Thomas was carefully seated thereon and borne from the field, to the accompaniment of a far-resounding chorus:

"There'll be a hot time in the old town to-night."

The Sand Fleas, good sportsmen that they were, trailed behind, and the hero was whisked from the field and into the highway like a Roman general returning from a field of glory.

The division engineer, who had hastened to find Thomas with a message from the general manager, viewed the demonstration, hesitated, and was baffled, for it would have taken a battering-ram to make a path through this close-packed, howling mob, four hundred strong.

Chagrined, he retreated to report that the young man had been snatched away beyond recall.

"Right you are," said the general manager. "We have no time to head him off at the steamer. We were due at the conference with the war department officials at the barracks fifteen minutes ago. I plead guilty. That ball game was something to remember. And that youngster has good stuff in him. I hate to lose him."

Helen Eastabrook looked confused, and kept silent. She had been forward and impulsive in defending poor Thomas, and she must be more discreet. To herself, however, her native candor compelled her to confess that she was unhappy at the thought of seeing the boyish, attractive fugitive no more among the keys. He was to be whisked from this romantic, tropical world far away to his own people, and there would be no more letters, no more chance meetings, no more adventures, and he would straightway forget the girl he had met on Little Spanish Key.

To be concluded, two weeks hence, in the first February number, on sale January 10.

The Winner Picker

By Charles R. Barnes

Author of "Mrs. Sweeny's Tactics," "The Car Ahead," Etc.

A bit of human nature which interests Mrs. Sweeny and the Boarder, and which will also interest you. It deals with the seamy side of life, and comedy and tragedy are intermingled as they always are in this world

"I WON'T have no corn on the cob," said Mrs. Sweeny decisively. "Whenever I see ladies eatin' it, I feel puffec'-ly sure that they'll have to go home and wash their back hair afterward. What, with twistin' them cobs around their necks, like some of them does—nope, mister, I'll have some lima beans, instead."

The Boarder had taken Mrs. Sweeny out to dinner. For some time past, she had been melancholy because of the continued and depressing stringency peculiar to her financial affairs. She had moped about the house, with no interest in life, and her usual entertaining chatter was stilled. The Boarder, in order to break the spell, invited her to dine with him in one of the big downtown restaurants—a proposition which she had accepted only after much objection.

"The gang will dope it out that you and me is gettin' serious if we get to paradin' through the White Light district together," she told him. "There's always them folks around that can't see no farther than the ends of their noses—but their noses is awful long. And a widow lady can't be too careful. I got troubles enough already, and I don't want no more. Why, it seems that life's just one darn thing after another, as the feller said."

In the end, however, the lure of her old stamping grounds overcame her fear of criticism, and she accompanied the Boarder to the ornate restaurant. And now they were in the midst of ordering dinner.

"When you see a lady eatin' corn on the cob in a place like this," she continued, "you can make up your mind that she's either with her husban', or somebody else she don't care nothin' much for."

She suddenly became intensely interested in two people who had taken seats at a near-by table. One was a sweet-faced girl of perhaps twenty-two; her companion was a slim, undersized fellow, who might be ten years her senior, but appeared much older than that. His face was thin and long and sharp, and there was a hardness about his mouth and a sallowness of complexion that suggested dissipation—yes, more than that, prison.

Mrs. Sweeny intently regarded the pair for a time. They seemed to fascinate her. The Boarder, watching her, saw her lips move, and an expression of deep sympathy come into her face.

"Say," she suddenly exclaimed, turning to him, "ain't it too bad!" There was more of assertion than question in her tone.

"I might give an opinion, if I knew what you are talking about," he hinted.

She included the couple in a quick gesture. "Them," she whispered.

"What of them?" he asked.

"Why, that's Bugs McGahan!" she explained, as if no further identification was necessary.

The Boarder waited.

"Don't you remember about him?" she queried.

"No," he replied blankly.

"Of course you don't," she admitted, "not bein' in our set. But all of Broadway does, you bet; they remember him better'n the names of the small towns they came from. If you want me to, I'll tell you about him while we're spoilin' the looks of that four dollars' worth of high livin' that the waiter's bringin'. What?"

"Proceed," the Boarder told her.

"I'll tell the manager to come and bite you if you talk like that!" she snapped. "You're makin' a noise like bein' kept in after school—and Mrs. Sweeny ain't recitin' her g'ography lesson. Proceed—oh, *very* well!"

The Boarder laughed. "I'd like to hear about those people, Mrs. Sweeny. Won't you tell me?" he besought.

"Now you're human," she declared. "Well, Bugs ain't been out of Sing Sing long—I didn't know he was out yet—oh, you poor Bugs!" She fell silent for a moment, as if debating something within herself.

"I don't know as I ought to tell about him," she said. "It never seemed right to me that people always has to pin a convict's past on his back, every time he's seen. But that's what they all do, don't they, mister? A man gets out of jail, and folks says: 'Dear me, I rully am sorry for the man.' Then they gets busy, and tells all they knows about him, and a little bit more. That ain't bein' sorry, is it? I alwus thought that such talk keeps people rememberin' somethin' they might forget, if they had a chance to do it."

"That's one way to look at it," commented the Boarder noncommittally.

"A lot of our set don't regard him as a crook," she rambled on, "and meby it would be just as well to tell the whole case, and not just that part of it that some folks delights to tell. That girl with him—she's the girl that started everything—she's his girl." Mrs. Sweeny gave the Boarder time to scrutinize the young woman closely. Then she went on with her story.

"Her name's Bess Murray, of that awful rich fam'ly out on the coast that has the big stables and tried to butt into s'ciety here by the horse route. You musta heard of 'em, because the papers was full of 'em a few years ago. They come on here for the racin' season with more swell trimmin's than a hall boy's suit. And Bess was just about the most kissy-lookin' doll that ever hollered her head off at a race. When the home folks disowned her——"

The waiter arrived at this point with his wide tray of good things, and Mrs. Sweeny ceased her narrative to inspect the result of the Boarder's ordering.

"Gee! this is livin', ain't it?" she whispered as the waiter withdrew. "If you was only big and strong and han'some and about half soused, I could shut my eyes and imagine I was dinin' with my poor dead husban'. He was alive when all this stuff happened to Bugs, and it touched his heart so that he offered the judge a thousand dollars of his own money as a bribe, but the mutt wouldn't take it. Sometimes them judges is too mean and graspin' for any use! Mrs. Gold Dollar Cohen says her husban' is awful down on 'em for it—say, mister, please hit the Worcestershire bottle in the eye for not comin' to Mrs. Sweeny when she wants it so bad—my, you're quick to take a hint," she complimented, as the Boarder set the bottle before her.

"Bugs was livin' with Marty Doyle in them days," she continued. "Them two had a bachelor flat; and that was the worst anybody ever said about Bugs, as far as I heard. Marty was the son of a rich father, who paid him liberal for stayin' away from his home in Kansas City, and all them two fellers ever done was to bet on the races. But Bugs didn't have anything comin' to him on the outside. He had to depend on his bug—the thing in his head that picked winners for him. Gee, he could pick 'em! That's why he got named 'Bugs.' You'd meet him on the street, and ask him what horse looked good in a certain race, and he'd say:

" 'I got a bug that Sea Lion will win in the third, like a beginner in a poker

game.' And, sure enough, he'd be right. Sea Lion would be the first in. Everybody was wise to Bugs' gift, and he was awful popular with the gang. The only times his tips wasn't good was on the twenty-sixth of the month —that bein' twice thirteen—and on days when he'd accidentally spill salt on the tablecloth. After a while, he quit feelin' for any horse dope on the twenty-sixth, but he couldn't get along without salt, so once in a while he had to lose. But that wasn't often. He won and won and won, until our set got awful nervous, waitin' for him to fall down. Nobody's luck ever run good all the time, and we figgered it that Bugs' would go back on him some day. But he kept winnin' and winnin' and us gettin' nervouser and nervouser ——" Bugs, at the other table, had glanced up, recognized Mrs. Sweeny, and then dropped his eyes to his place.

"See," she said, in an intense undertone, "he feels it. He thinks the world is against him. He wasn't sure that I'd speak. Well, I guess a lot of people wouldn't, at that. But when a feller cares so much for a girl that he'll —well, you just listen to the story of it, mister, and see if you'd speak.

"There was some big race doin's around these parts when them Murrays hit Broadway. They had Bess with 'em; she wasn't more'n eighteen, then. And there was a big rough neck of a gold miner in the party, too, posin' as a suitor of the girl. He was worth a million or two, but he was forty, and wore black whiskers that looked like a dyed whiskbroom. There wasn't no class to him a-tall, mister. He was about as much of a match for that delicate little girl as a anarchist would be for a real swell, misses' size, cloak model. It was beauty and the beast, but, as English Charley usta say, the beast was deuced beastly, you know. Later on, Bugs got into the combination—he ain't such a awful low brow, is he, mister?"

"He has good table manners," praised the Boarder wonderingly, for he remembered several things Mrs. Sweeny had mentioned in that connection about her "set."

"Well, he had good raisin'," she explained. "He come from a good fam'ly out in Ohiuh, somewheres; but there wasn't enough doin' in that State for him, so he lit out for this here pleasin' village. And, bein' that he was awful flush when the Murrays come on, he was considered top-notch s'ciety by our set, and got interduced to the old man and his third wife and the rough-neck gold miner and Bess. The first time them two young people come together, it was all off, as far as Old Whiskers was concerned. Bess fell for Bugs like a grass widow for a college boy, and the rough-neck guy was runnin' lame somewheres in the back stretch, without a chance. Love at first sight is a fine thing, mister, and I'd be for it strong, if it only turned out good once in a while." She sorrowfully contemplated the two at the other table while she searched her memory for the details of the story.

"It musta been a couple of weeks after them two met, that Bugs' luck went to the bad," she said. "And one day he went to the track with the little girl and lost his last five hundred. Marty Doyle said, afterward, that he didn't spill no salt on the tablecloth that mornin' at breakfast, and if he done it at all it musta been when he was havin' lunch with Bess at the hotel. Anyway, however you account for it, Bugs was broke; and almost as quick as it happened, our set knew about it, and so did old man Murray. He didn't treat the poor boy like one of the family, after that; and they say that Bugs was just spillin' over with proud and disdainful feelin's for the whole Murray bunch, except Bess, but didn't dare to show it. Can't you sympathize with him, mister?"

"His position was difficult," agreed the Boarder.

Mrs. Sweeny looked at him as if she wished that he had expressed himself with more emotion. Then she admitted:

"Yes, I guess that's one way of puttin' it. But Bess was a little thoroughbred. She just rubbed a fresh coat of glue on her arm, squeezed harder

against Bugs, and stuck closer. All the ladies in our set wondered at it, b'cause their idee is to stick to the live ones, and let the dead ones go and make good again, or get a job in the street-cleanin' department. Our idees ain't so much different from other women's, only we don't try to hide 'em.

"Marty was a good fr'en' to Bugs at this tryin' time. At first, he staked his side partner to fifty dollars a day, hopin' the poor feller could dig up some hunches on a few winners and get his feet under him again. But, honest, mister, Bugs was unluckier than a bank clerk. Them bank fellers usually draw a few fast ponies and make encouragin' killin's b'fore they get sent to the penitantiary or commit suicide. But Bugs couldn't find anything that had any speed. It was lose, lose, lose for his, every time he put down a bet. Why, some of the bookies—my Danny among 'em—refused to take his money, telling him to go and wait table in some 'ham and' place till his luck changed. But he wouldn't do it.

"He kept on bettin' till Marty wouldn't give him no more money. Then he touched everybody he knew, pawned his clothes and things, and turned every cent over to them guys in the bettin' ring. And it was the same old story—lose, lose, lose. The bug wasn't no good, any more. And, take it from me, mister, that boy wouldn't have had any place to sleep if Marty hadn't let him keep on livin' in the flat.

"Marty was sure a king, for he paid all the groc'ry bills, and loosened up for the laundry, and let Bugs have cigarette money till he found it was all goin' to the cheap handbooks; then he bought the cigarettes himself, not bein' able to bear the thought of his poor side kicker roamin' the streets without no cigarettes. Yes, sir, Marty was sure an ace, all right. He would have kept on providin' Bugs with money to bet, only he knew there wasn't no use. The luck was gone; and he knew, as well as any of us, thet there was nothin' to do but lay low, and wait for it to come back. Bugs knew it, too, and everybody else knew he knew it. When he kept on throwin' money away, we all thought he was full of dope or plain crazy. Then it began to be circulated 'round that he had planned to be married to Bess in a couple of weeks. Later, we found out that it was true. And the reason behind his wild carryin' ons was plain enough—he had to have a sock full of iron men to get married on, and there wasn't no way of gettin' 'em but out of the bookies——"

"Couldn't he get work?" interrupted the Boarder.

"Work," cried Mrs. Sweeny scornfully, "work! What do you s'pose a bettin' man is a bettin' man for, anyway? Work! He's a bettin' man so's he won't have to work! It's in his system, bettin' is. He's been bettin' so long that he's forgot what work is like. He couldn't do none of it. No, sir; Bugs was a true sport, and so it didn't occur to him to work. He just rushed up and down the easy-money route, really workin' harder than a sweat-shop hand, but not realizin' it, and proud that he was stickin' to the traditions of his class. Yes, sir, Bugs was sure a true sport—any one will say at least that much for him.

"And, while he was buckin' up against all that trouble, things wasn't goin' any too smooth with Bess Murray. Our set began to get wise to trouble between her and her pa. Sometimes it would break out when they was at the track, and the old man never seemed to care who heard 'em scrappin'. He was beginnin' to hate Bugs for bein' broke, and I guess the roughneck gold miner sicked him on. So, whenever Bess appeared in public with the feller she liked, the old gent would start somethin'. It all ended up at the hotel, one afternoon—and I got this straight from the clerk, who got it from two chambermaids that was listenin' at the keyhole.

"'Bess,' her father says, loud and mad, 'you got to give up that piker or give up me.'

"'Oh,' she says, 'ast me somethin' hard—that's too easy, pa-pah.'

"'Well,' he growls, 'what's the answer?'

"'There ain't only one answer,' she says. 'I got thutty-five cents in my pocketbook,' she says; 'and Noo York ain't no nice place to be in without no money,' she says; 'but, at that, look hard and you'll see me walkin' out of this hotel in five minutes. Kindly,' she says, 'leave my room, while I pack.'

"He went out and slammed the door, real turrible in his anger, which is the very words the clerk used. And Bess did just what she said she would. She put on two pairs of silk stockin's as baggage, stuffed a extra handkerchief in her pocket, and walked out of the hotel. Wasn't she game!"

"I should call her impulsive," said the Boarder.

"Oh, you're too practical," Mrs. Sweeny cried in vexation. "Why didn't you holler, 'Bully fer Liz!' and show that you've a mind above keepin' your coat on at the dinner table, just b'cause it's manners? I like folks that breaks loose once in a while, as she did. Only, I s'pose it wasn't a wise thing to do, being that Bugs was down and out and had troubles enough without her throwin' herself on him. Anyway, that's what she done, and it wasn't five minutes after she left the hotel till she met him, on his way to see her. The rest of it happened so quick that Bugs musta been the most surprised feller in town.

"'I've left home on your account, Bugs, dear,' she tells him.

"'What?' he says

"'Pop and me ha had a fierce fight,' she says, 'over you,' she says; 'and I've shook the dust of that place off my feet,' she says, never thinkin' how foolish that sounds, on account of there bein' vacuum cleaners there which takes up all the dust every mornin'.

"'You ain't left your pa and his third wife?' says Bugs, worried like.

"'I sure have, Bugs dear,' she tells him.

"'Gee,' he says, 'I wisht you wouldn't have did it!'

"The next minute"—Mrs. Sweeny's eyes widened with the horror of it—"she had jerked a bottle of somethin' out of her hand bag. 'Bugs,' she says, 'I've kept somethin' handy for just such a time. I've felt trouble comin', Bugs dear—trouble concernin' you and me that I couldn't hardly dope out; but I knew it would be somethin' I couldn't bear. So I got this.'

"She was talkin' so quiet that Bugs didn't realize what was comin' off. He didn't quite grasp whether there was smellin' salts or what, in that bottle. She was kinda toyin' with it as she goes on. 'Bugs,' she says, 'I could bear it when pop was mad and scolded me; but when you scold me like you just done, dear'—she put the bottle to her lips and drank—'I can't stand it—I want to die!'"

The Boarder stared curiously at the girl.

"Yes," affirmed Mrs. Sweeny, "right there sits the girl that done it. You wouldn't think it of her to look at her, would you—the sweet, quiet little thing. But she did, all right. And Bugs—say, he was just too sweet and quick about what he done! As soon as he seen the bottle go to her lips, he grabbed her in his arms, and rushed her to a empty cab that was standin' at the curb. He hollers a number at the driver, and tells him to drive like he was drunk. And all this, mister, without a cent in his pocket. Wasn't that nerve, though!

"Well, in about five minutes they draws up in front of a private hospital where they takes in men and women that goes crazy with drink and cigarettes and morphine—them cases that a big city sends out from what it is proud to brag of as its Great White Way. They call the place a sanitarium, but it's really a home where people can get enough health back to start in and do them things all over again. Bugs knew of the doctor that run it; knew of him as a graftin' doctor that would kill a man if there was enough money in it. So he takes the girl there, b'cause attempted suicide in New York is a crime that they arrest you for. And it bein' a police case, Bugs knew from the minute it happened that it would have to be hushed up; and, as she did it so public like, he figgered that only a crook doctor would take the chances.

"When they got to the sanitarium door, Bess was gettin' in a awful way, and my, but Bugs was scared! Him and the driver carried her in, and there's the doctor, just on his way out.

"'H'm!' he says, doubtful, when Bugs says it's a police case, 'I don't know about that!'

"'Name your price,' says Bugs, 'and you get it,' he says. 'Only do somethin' quick; she's dyin',' he says.

"'It's too big a risk for me to take,' says the doctor, lookin' at the girl, who sure was goin' fast.

"'Do somethin'—do somethin'!' yells Bugs, half crazy by this time.

"'Well,' says the doc, namin' a outrageous big sum, 'if you can pay that much, I'll attend to her.'

"'Sure I can,' hollers Bugs, without a cent in his pocket, and no outlook for a hurry touch.

"'Take her back, then,' says the doc, and the attendants carried her away.

"After that, Bugs and the feller talked business, and the doc holds him up some more for every day Bess has to stay there.

"'Of course,' says Bugs, 'I don't carry that much money with me, but I'll run out now and get my check cashed. My cab's waitin',' he says, just as if everything was all right. You know, mister, them crook doctors is awful suspicious, not bein' on the square theirselfs; but this feller seen how earnest Bugs was, and figgered that the boy was all right. So he let it go at that. And what does Bugs do? There he was, without a cent and in desp'rate need of money. And there's no place to go and get it, for nobody'd believe his story, and he wouldn't tell on Bess, anyway, see?

"He gets in the cab, and a bright idee strikes him. He tells the driver to take him uptown to the apartment hotel where he usta live, and takes a chance on the clerk not knowin' about his bein' down and out.

"'Timmy,' he says to the feller, 'I got to have a piece of money right away; is my check good here, like it usta be?'

"'Sure,' says the clerk; 'how much?'

"'Make it a hundred,' says Bugs, takin' out his checkbook that ain't been used since he went broke. He writes out his check real serious, and the clerk cashes it, for the race-track gossip don't get around to them slow-goin' fam'ly hotels as quick as it ought to. So there's Bugs, a crook for sure, havin' got money on a bad check, but fixed to give the girl a chance. So he drives right back to the sanitarium, pays off the cabby, and goes in. They told him that Bess hadn't died, and that she had a fightin' chance for her life. But the doctor, when he seen how easy Bugs gave up real money, did some quick and heavy thinkin', and had somethin' to say.

"'A Central Office man was 'round here while you was gone,' he says. Some one seen the girl drink the stuff, and follered the cab here. Then they tips off the police. That detective's got to be fixed,' he says.

"'How much,' inquires Bugs, 'is that goin' to cost?'

"'Well,' says the doctor, 'he happens to be a fr'en' of mine, in a way—that is, I know him—and he was sayin' somethin' about needin' fifty to get a new suit of clothes with.'

"'All right,' says Bugs, 'I'll have the money 'round here to-night. I wasn't expectin' this, or I'd brought more with me.'

"'Don't mention it,' says the doctor; 'we all get in these awkward positions sometimes. If the man comes back, I'll hand him the money myself, and you can pay me. Ain't it awful how dishonest them police is?' says the doctor.

"'Yes,' says Bugs, 'they're turrible fellers.' And with that he goes away, knowin' just as well as he knowed anything that there wasn't no detective to fix, but what was he goin' to do? The doctor held all the cards, and it was up to Bugs to count out money and hand it over.

"But he was game, all right. Bess was in trouble, and he couldn't think of kickin' at anything that was for her good. As he seen it, he must do everything he could for her. He didn't care

for himself, just so she had all she needed. So he thinks the thing over a while, and then blew out to Harlem, where he knows a restaurant keeper that ain't wised up to his bein' broke. They're awful farmers in Harlem, and don't never hear no news till after everybody else has quit talkin' about it. This man cashes his check for another hundred without no question. And then, bein' two times a crook, he goes back and gives the doctor the fifty.

"He realized that he'd lost his good name and was facin' jail for Bess, but he didn't care. He didn't even think about it much. All he cared for was to get her well again, and there wasn't nothin' he wouldn't do to make that happen. The gang's all callin' him a jailbird, now; but——" Mrs. Sweeny looked the Boarder squarely in the eye questioningly, as if asking his view of the matter. But she did not voice the query, and soon was in her story again.

"It was only a few days till Bess was clear out of danger, and then Bugs plans to get her away from that graftin' doctor. He went to a hotel and arranged for a nice suite of two rooms and bath for his invalid sister, and he gets a cheap furnished room in the neighborhood to be near her. You can imagine that she's still in a turrible state, all nervous and kinda wild in her head. She had to be watched all the time, b'cause she kept threatenin' to do the thing all over again, bein' 'shamed to face anybody. And on that account, Bugs got her a trained nurse, and gave orders to the hotel people that everything Suite Seven asked for was to be sent up.

"Then, more money had to come his way. The night followin' the day Bess moved in that hotel, a feller in our set named Duke Thrasher wins a hundred and fifty off a wheel in the Tenderloin. Bugs was in there and seen him go out with the money on him. I ain't sayin' nothin' definite about this, b'cause it was never proved real good against Bugs; but Duke was hit on the head while he was passin' a dark place in Forty-fourth Street, and that money was took away from him."

"Did they arrest Bugs?" asked the Boarder.

"No," replied Mrs. Sweeny, "for nobody suspected him of anything till the day that awful news went 'round that set our crowd crazy with surprise. Honust, mister, we just couldn't believe what we heard, at first. But when Marty Doyle makes his statement to the cops, we had to. I tell you, them was excitin' times!

"Bugs, it seems, got awful nervous b'cause Bess didn't get along as well as she ought to. He thought she was goin' to die, and he just couldn't bear the thought of losin' her. So he called in specialists that charge a couple months' rent in a elevator house for a visit, got another nurse, and went at the thing like a millionaire. He moved heaven and earth for that girl, mister. And all the time he had to keep dark, b'cause he didn't know what minute the police would be lookin' for him.

"Then there comes along a day when he has to have a big bank roll to stall off the hotel people and the nurses and the doctors and the bills for flowers and things that was comin' in. You remember he wasn't at Mary's place, no more, but was livin' in that dinky little room—you can see from that how much of that crooked money he was spendin' on hisself. Every cent of it went to keep Bess from fadin' away and dyin', and she wasn't far from it then, neither.

"One night Marty Doyle goes home early from downtown, bein' tired out, and thinkin' he'd try to get catched up with his sleep. About one o'clock in the mornin' he wakes up to find some one in a mask, holdin' a chloroform rag over his face. Marty is a big boy, so he gets out of bed and starts something. There wasn't any light in the room, but the street lamps lit it up enough so a person could see a little. As soon as Marty jumps out of bed, the burglar swats him over the head with a sock full of sand, or something. This hurts bad, but Marty is game, and gets up to come back. Bing! He gets it again, and the battle is over. But as he sinks down on the floor and

his senses go 'way, he jerks off the mask the fellow wears, and it's Bugs!

"When he comes to the next afternoon, he found that he had been beaten almost to death. His di'mond pins and rings and studs had been taken, besides fifty or sixty dollars he had in his pocket. And Bugs had done that, mister. Yes, sir, he had gone and robbed and almost murdered the best fr'en' he had in the world—a man that had done more for him than anybody else; and all for that girl! Gee! do you wonder that all turf s'ciety was upset at seein' one of its members get in so wrong as that? Everybody was most awful shocked. If it had been just passin' bum checks, we wouldn't have thought so much of it—'cause a lot of us has done little things like that. But goin' back on a fr'en', and all that rough stuff with it, set us against Bugs real hard. He looked like a plain strong-arm guy to us, for we didn't know about the Bess part of it then—we didn't find out till later." Mrs. Sweeny leaned back in her chair, and tapped absently on the tablecloth with a spoon.

"Perhaps it's a fool thing to do," she went on, at length, "but somehow I'd like to make things easier for him—for them—to bear. Do you think it would give him a little more confidence, or ambish, or make him feel better if I went over and recognized him, before everybody?"

"Yes, I do," said the Boarder, with decision; "and I'll go with you. There's a lot of good in that fellow."

"That's what I been thinkin'," she agreed; "and he ought to be given a show. Why, after the police got him, he wouldn't say a word involvin' Bess, but just sat back and told 'em to hand him out his medicine. The chances is that nobody would have known much about her connection with his stealin' if she hadn't insisted on gettin' out of her bed and tellin' everything she knew. Then, of course, it all came out why he done them dreadful things. I guess her story had a lot to do with cuttin' down his sentence from ten years to five. Goodness sakes, mister, they had him charged with burglary and larceny and swindlin', and assault with intent to kill, and lots of other stuff that I can't remember now. It's a wonder they didn't send him away for the rest of his life!"

"Mrs. Sweeny," said Bugs, in a low aside, after she and the Boarder had openly recognized them, "I won't forget this. You're the first that has had the nerve—or the goodness. They don't make 'em any better than you!"

"Oh, you forget it!" she cried, embarrassed.

"I mean it," he said earnestly, "and"—hesitatingly—"I wonder if you and the gent will go along and be witnesses while we get married."

"We will," promptly answered the Boarder, for both.

Later, as they rode in a taxicab on the way to a certain little church, Bugs said:

"Old man Murray is sending me to Paris to look after some of his business interests there. Bess and I sail to-morrow, and we're not coming back. It'll be more—congenial—there. The old gang won't be around to—remember—you know. And I won't do any more crooked work!"

"Well," observed Mrs. Sweeny, "I ain't so sure of that. If I hear that the president's house, over there, has been jimmied, I'll know that Bess is sick and needs somethin'."

Queen Caroline's Bracelet

By J. Kenilworth Egerton

Author of "Underground Diplomacy," "Omertà," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

The body of a murdered man is found in the private office of Cirillo, an Italian banker of New York. Ralston, who defends Cirillo, discovers the Black Hand back of the tragedy. The body is identified as that of Hispali, an Italian, who had smuggled historical jewels into the country. Cirillo admits that he bought a priceless jewel—a bracelet whose inscription indicates that it was given to Lady Hamilton by Queen Caroline—but he states that he got it not from Hispali, but from Ignazio Conforti, who is missing. Ralston goes to Italy in search of Conforti. He has a letter to Winthrop Clifford in Naples, and they exchange confidences. They meet Alinari, a criminal lawyer, friend of Don Alessandro, a notorious priest, and an evident scoundrel named Lupocino. Ralston is warned by Alinari to leave Italy, but only laughs. Later he is wounded by a dagger-thrust, but is rescued by Police Captain Farloni, who hears their story and tells them that the bracelet bought by Cirillo is one that had been stolen from Salipi, great-grandson of Lady Hamilton, in Naples. Clifford, in the character of Cherubini, an ex-convict from the Ponza Islands, scrapes acquaintance with Left Paw, a bloodthirsty tool of the Camorra. Meanwhile Ralston decides to return to America and leave Clifford to follow the trail. Clifford, in the rôle of Cherubini, the counterfeiter, is offered membership in the Camorra by Left Paw, and is taken to Don Alessandro, the priest, who is high in the society. Clifford is ordered to prepare a forgery of a hundred-year-old document. He is given some old papers on which to experiment, and discovers these are letters of Lady Hamilton relating to the early history of the Camorra. In his own character he learns of the death of Ralston on shipboard, and is introduced to Don Alessandro, who fails to recognize in him the supposed Cherubini.

IX.

CLIFFORD had returned to his rooms after his final day at the chemical laboratory. The kit of materials and apparatus was ready packed for transportation to the sacristy, where he was to do his work under the supervision of Don Alessandro; but he was still facing the problem of disposing of Peppo, the Rat, who doggedly maintained his vigil of vengeance. He might have risked the transformation to Cherubini in another place; but, knowing the close freemasonry of Neapolitan Vagabondia, he realized that in doing so he would simply exchange a lesser for a greater danger. Probably every cabman and all of Peppo's ragamuffin acquaintances in the city knew the motive which tempted him to neglect his regular profession for his private vengeance, and so thoroughly approved of it that their sympathy would make them willing accomplices.

If he appeared on the streets in the character of Cherubini, a dozen volunteer messengers would carry the news to the waiting man, and he would sacrifice the advantage of knowing where he might expect attack.

Clifford was not hampered by false sentiment in planning to deal with the situation; but the thought of killing the poor little thief—who was simply living up to the only code he knew in his warped, perverted life—was repugnant.

It was absolutely necessary for his own safety to render Peppo temporarily harmless, however; and he determined, as it was inexpedient to call the law to his assistance, to be a law unto himself.

A few minutes sufficed to change his

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identity with his clothing; and so thoroughly did he enter into the part that it was with a certain fierce pleasure he completed his preparations.

His apartment, although he used only a part of it, was a complete one—a salon, which he used as a study; a bedroom; and, back of that, communicating with the salon by a narrow, dark passage, a small kitchen; and a servant's room—such a dungeon-like, small room as only a Chinaman or a Neapolitan would consent to sleep in. As he employed an outside servant to care for his apartment and prepare his simple breakfast, that space hollowed out of the thick wall under the staircase—called, by courtesy, a servant's room—was unoccupied.

His preparations were simple enough—a couple of screw eyes opposite each other in the baseboards of the dark passage; stretched between them, six inches from the floor, a stout cord; conveniently disposed on the far side, a piece of rope and a bundle of rags. Two minutes of practice enabled him to judge the exact place from which he must jump from the floor to avoid that cord.

Five minutes later, Peppo, the Rat, pursued the fleeing Cherubini up the stairway from the courtyard, gaining on him at every step through the dimly lighted hallway, almost on his heels as his prospective victim sought safety through a door which stood conveniently open into an unknown apartment.

So close was he when his quarry darted into the entrance of a dark passage that his knife was already raised to strike, and he gave a shout of triumph.

But, at the very moment his vengeance seemed sure of accomplishment, he fell flat on his face, and the knife, flying from his hand, scuttled noisily along the tiled floor. Instantly the man he was pursuing turned and was upon him; and, before he could gather his scattered wits to offer resistance, he was choked into insensibility.

It was a good half hour before consciousness returned, and then he found himself incapable of movement, unable to cry out. His hands and feet were securely bound, his mouth was crammed with an effective gag of rags, and Cherubini, with the key of his prison securely stowed in his pocket, was driving to keep his rendezvous with Don Alessandro.

In his eagerness for results, the priest hardly deigned to greet the man who had come to produce them for him; but, lifting the heavy boxes with an ease which proclaimed his great strength, he carried them quickly to the sacristy.

Clifford followed him more leisurely, taking time to note every detail of the arrangement of doors and windows, and counting his steps to each turn, that he might, if urged by necessity, make a hasty retreat in the dark. He knew that in that lonely place the odds would be all against him if it came to a contest.

"I hope that you have brought everything necessary, Cherubini; you have been long enough about it," said Don Alessandro irritably, as he deposited the last heavy box carefully on the floor.

"It's a case where undue haste in preparation would inevitably spell failure in results," answered Clifford. "It would not have helped you any if I had met with an accident from lack of precaution."

In his eagerness, the priest was already moving out the bookshelf where the strong boxes were hidden.

"You prepare your materials, and I'll sort out mine," he said curtly. "Our need for haste is imperative."

Clifford busied himself with his unpacking and arrangement, relieved that the priest's anxiety for him to get to work saved him from embarrassing personal scrutiny.

"I fear that there is a great deal of experimenting to be done before we can accomplish much," he said warningly. "This will not be as simple a matter as bleaching a banknote, and that was sufficiently difficult, although I knew the exact chemical formula of the ink and the texture and quality of the paper. We don't even know whether this ink is a vegetable or mineral preparation, and I may destroy a hundred or more

papers before we get the result we are looking for."

Don Alessandro threw several packets on the table. "A thousand, if necessary; but get to work," he answered imperatively, as a man who is accustomed to quick and unquestioning obedience.

Clifford glanced at the papers eagerly, and filled a white porcelain tray with water.

"I can't be unduly hurried," he said coolly. "The more haste, the less speed in chemical experiments. For instance, I must first get the paper thoroughly saturated with clean water, that the subsequent chemical bath may work evenly and not cause streaks."

Don Alessandro grumbled a malediction as Clifford took one of the papers, and, after opening it, spread it, writing upward, in the tray. His finger tips worked over its surface deftly, and, while Don Alessandro was irritated by the delay, he saw in it only the deliberation of the careful operator, little suspecting that Clifford was sparring for the time necessary to read the contents of the papers as he spread them carefully, one by one, on top of each other in the water.

They were all from the hand of Lady Hamilton. The first ones were in English; and, although without superscription, were evidently intended for some one in whose unscrupulousness and fidelity to herself she had perfect faith. Others were in Italian, a few in the dialect peculiar to Naples. As he read them, he realized that he was perusing the inner history of that stormy period which gave birth to the Camorra of today.

Those to Cardinal Ruffo, the soldier-prince of the church, who organized the brigands of the hills and the convicts of the Sicilian and Calabrian prisons into that "Army of the Holy Faith" which aided Nelson's fleet to restore the Bourbons to their capital, were instructive in showing how greatly she was in the confidence of the king and queen, and her absolute sway over England's naval hero. She was evidently playing one leader against the other, and threatened the cardinal with the admiral's displeasure because he refused to deliver to the English flagship certain prisoners whom she had marked for execution—and Clifford knew from the history of the times that her threats had been effectual.

To the chief of that complaisant tribunal which unhesitatingly passed sentence upon the men who had surrendered to Nelson in all good faith as prisoners of war, she wrote imperatively, designating those from whom judicious torture might extract valuable information, giving explicit directions as to the order in which they were to die, naming those who should be granted the grace of the axe, and who should endure the added ignominy of the rope. Even the *Fratelli Bianchi*—that white-shrouded brotherhood whose members attended the condemned on their short passage from the farcical court to scaffold or gibbet—did not escape her epistles, and in one of them she scolded them roundly that their spiritual ministrations were so prolonged that they caused unnecessary and vexatious delay.

In every important town of the Province of Naples, there stands to-day a tablet inscribed with the names of the "martyrs" of that terrible year, and those same names appeared again and again in the correspondence of this foreign woman who had done so much to hound them to their deaths.

But all this was of far less significance in Clifford's eyes than the fact that the men who had been her tools and accomplices bore the same names as those whom he knew to be prominent in the modern Camorra. A Lupocino had been her lieutenant to lead the mob which murdered the prisoners who accumulated more rapidly than they could be conveniently disposed of by the Bourbon tribunal of vengeance. She had depended upon a Vitello to furnish the false evidence against those whose family connections were so powerful that they could not be executed without a semblance of justification. A Conforti had unhesitatingly pronounced the bloody sentences which she dictated.

To a police officer searching for evidence in a modern criminal case, these old records would have meant nothing; but to Clifford, whose aim was to penetrate the mysteries of the Camorra organization, they were a gold mine of suggestion.

He was disappointed when Don Alessandro checked his researches by suggesting curtly that he had prepared a sufficient number for his first experiments. He felt himself guilty of vandalism when he deliberately mixed solutions which he knew would destroy completely those records which would have been of priceless value to a historian. But sacrificed they must be, if he was to gain access to the others; and he justified himself by arguing that the information he would gain might prevent the making of equally tragic history in the future.

He was convinced that the hiding place of which the priest had so readily betrayed the secret was used only for the preservation of the ancient archives of the society, and that while Don Alessandro was also the custodian of the current records they were kept in another place. The priest had brought from outside the sacristy the transcripts of recent sentences which he had used to intimidate him, and Clifford remembered his statement that the seizure of these old papers by the police could bring harm to no living man.

Clifford had prepared himself to meet emergencies, and all of the time he had spent in the chemical laboratory had not been devoted to experimentation in ink removal. Nor were all the materials which he had brought required in that process. There were solutions in some of those bottles which, mixed together, would make violent explosives; others contained liquids whose fumes would stupefy the man incautious enough to inhale them; and in one tiny phial was an alkaloid, of which a tiny drop on a mucous membrane or beneath the skin would render the most powerful man a helpless paralytic. Any one of these Clifford was prepared to use without the slightest compunction as a weapon of defense, for he knew that the priest would not hesitate a moment about killing him mercilessly if he suspected his real identity.

For the moment, however, it was purely a contest of wits between them. Don Alessandro, for his own purposes or those of the society which he served, was employing the talents of the man whom he believed to be a criminal. Clifford was taking advantage of his opponent's ignorance of chemistry to beguile him into delay, that he might gain access to as many of the ancient archives as possible, and, far more important, perhaps even learn the hiding place of the more modern records.

Of the real purpose of all this experimenting he was ignorant, but he believed that some paper of the greatest importance to the men of to-day was missing from those old archives—a paper which, in the absence of the original, they required duplicated so cunningly that the substitution would defy detection.

Connecting Don Alessandro's very evident perturbation, the previous evening, with the admission of Left Paw that he had stolen certain papers with the jewels, he made a shrewd guess that these were the identical papers they wished duplicated, and that Left Paw was entirely ignorant of the power which their possession gave him. He was so thoroughly convinced of this that he intended to have Left Paw's person and baggage searched on his arrival in New York; but while the *Rutanic* was still at sea he dared neglect no opportunity to penetrate as deeply as possible the secrets of the Camorra.

Don Alessandro watched every movement intently as Clifford lifted the first of the papers from the water bath and laid it carefully in a second tray containing a chemical solution. The priest gave an exclamation of disappointment when the faded ink, instead of vanishing as he expected it would, grew even more distinct.

"Patience, *padre*," said Clifford reassuringly. "We're only at the beginning, and I warned you that we should encounter many difficulties. Ink was

prepared from so many different materials a hundred years ago that we must feel our way. We can't expect to dissolve it until we have learned its composition from experiment."

It taxed his ingenuity to the utmost to achieve failure after failure without arousing suspicion; for, in reality, the task before him was so simple that in an hour he could have removed every trace of writing from that mass of correspondence. The ink was undoubtedly prepared from oak galls, and time had already done so much to disintegrate it that a single bath of weak oxalic or citric acid would have removed every remaining vestige of it.

Don Alessandro watched failure after failure with increasing impatience and irritability, and the morning sun was already shining in the windows far above their heads when Clifford raised the last of the papers from the solution, free from any trace of the secrets it had contained—only to have the paper crackle into bits as it came in contact with the air.

Don Alessandro brought his great fist down on the table so hard that the apparatus rattled and jingled.

"*Per Bacco,* you'll have to do better than this, Cherubini!" he protested angrily. "I tell you time is precious to me, and here is an entire night wasted!"

"Only wasted so far as lack of immediate success goes, *padre,*" protested Clifford. "I'll admit that I haven't accomplished much; but in chemical investigation we learn a lot from negative results."

"I'm not employing you for your own education," retorted the priest. "I tell you that I must have results—and quick ones. If you can't produce them, I'll find some one who can."

"I've done my best," Clifford said, with the sullenness of a boy unjustly accused. "I warned you that this would be difficult. Give me modern writing with modern ink—such as those other records which you showed me, for instance—and I'll guarantee to return to you virgin paper within an hour. Not every one could do even that much. I didn't succeed with banknotes until I had destroyed a small fortune. It may take several nights devoted to experiments before I can succeed as well with these musty old papers."

Don Alessandro glowered at him. "Cherubini, you can't have several nights for it; that is out of the question. Since I saw you, I have learned that the blundering which made this work necessary was worse than I believed, and any day we may be called upon to fight with this paper as our only weapon."

Clifford waited in silence for further confidences, but Don Alessandro paused and looked at him expectantly.

"What is the very longest time you can give me?" asked Clifford, eying the remaining mass of papers hungrily.

The priest made a rapid mental calculation. "I must have the completed papers within a week," he said; and Clifford also calculated that just about that time would elapse before the arrival of details by post of the find in Cirillo's apartment. "Once the paper is prepared, the rest should be child's play for you."

"That all depends, *padre;* it is often the apparently trivial thing which is the most difficult."

Don Alessandro shook his head and grinned. "For Cherubini, the man who could engrave a plate which printed such admirable imitations that even experts were deceived, it should be a simple matter to imitate such writing as this," he said, pointing to the scrawling chirography of Lady Hamilton. "That is all that will be necessary."

Clifford looked at the papers dubiously, in spite of the priest's expression of confidence.

"It's the lack of time which makes it difficult," he objected. "First, the paper must be prepared, and you have already seen how many failures I have made. Then, aside from the mere difficulty of imitation—which, I admit, is not great—we must make a corresponding ink, and the ingredients are still unknown to us. After we have accomplished all that, we must still fade that ink artificially to the same degree of

faintness. *Padre,* this isn't such a simple thing as it looks, and a time limit doesn't decrease the difficulties. As I told you, with such papers as you showed me—those death sentences with the curious symbols—I could promise you in a short time a forgery which no one could detect. If you like, I stand ready to demonstrate that to you. But I can't tell how long it will take to accomplish the other result which you require."

Don Alessandro scowled, and looked at him sharply.

"Cherubini, could you do that only partially? Could you eradicate one part of the writing so that words could be substituted without changing the rest?"

Clifford smiled confidently. "That *would* be child's play—to change a name, for instance." The priest gave just the slightest start at the suggestion. "That is the whole foundation of check-raising, which I practiced several times without detection."

Don Alessandro nodded, and started for the door leading to the chapel; but hesitated, and turned back, with the key in his hand.

"No; I'll wait for the results of your other experiments," he said thoughtfully, much to Clifford's disappointment. "Then, if you fail me in that, you can demonstrate your skill in another way, and the man whose bungling has caused this loss shall pay me for it."

X.

The experience with Peppo, the Rat, had warned Clifford to be more careful in returning to his apartment in the character of Cherubini; and, having in mind Don Alessandro's admission that he trusted no man farther than he was obliged to, he did not feel that he was safe from espionage.

As a first precaution, he ordered his cabman to drive to the Galleria Umberto, trusting that through one of its many exits he could slip out and elude possible trailers. But, as they were passing the Immacolatella, he called to the driver to stop; and, tossing him his fare, jumped out.

At first, he hardly believed his eyes—but the man coming hurriedly from the wharf was undoubtedly Left Paw. For just a moment Clifford saw red, and his instinct was to attack this man whom he believed to be the murderer of his friend; but he had learned self-control in a hard school, and the hand which longed to strike was extended in greeting.

"Where from, pal?" he asked, in a voice which it required no little effort to make cordial.

Left Paw indicated with his thumb a great liner which had just anchored. "On that, from Gibraltar. You received my message?"

Clifford nodded assent. "I've been on the job ever since. Come and have a drink!"

Left Paw shook his head. "Business first—and I've plenty of it on hand," he answered reluctantly. "Meet me at the osteria this afternoon, and we'll go some place and wallow in it."

Clifford watched him vindictively as he swaggered away, no doubt to claim the reward of an assassin; but he consoled himself with the mental promise that some day he would be instrumental in paying him off in another coin. Then, twisting and turning and doubling on his tracks, he made his way to the old palazzo, and, hastily changing to his American clothes, he went whistling to his kitchen.

He rattled about its meagre equipment of pots and pans, as if searching for something; then, opening the door of the servant's room, he gave an exclamation of surprise, conveying the impression that the last thing he expected to find there was the man he had locked in the night before. He dragged him out unceremoniously, removed the gag and ropes, and ordered him to stand up. Poor Peppo was too cramped from the tight ropes to obey, and only groaned miserably.

"You'll have to explain this, you know, and tell me how the deuce you happen to be hiding in my quarters," said Clifford sternly.

Peppo pointed to his mouth, and, after gulping down a glass of water, he

mumbled: "Do you think I tied myself up? Say, mister, I didn't mean to come here, and I'll get out as soon as I can stand on my legs."

"We'll see about that, later; but I want to know all about it first," answered Clifford. He gathered up the bewildered Peppo, and carried him to a couch in his study, where he chafed the cramped limbs until they recovered a measure of elasticity. Before he had finished, his servant came in, and the hot coffee which he administered restored his victim to fluency of speech.

Peppo's imagination was facile, and the delay had given him time to fabricate a wonderfully smooth and plausible explanation of his presence in the apartment; but, while Clifford admired it as fiction, he refused to accept it.

"That won't wash, my boy; I've noticed you loitering about here for days, so I cannot believe that only yesterday you were enticed from your father's vineyard by those mysterious men who were going to make your fortune and ended by depositing you in my servant's room," he said, grinning. "Unless I am very much mistaken, this little toy which I found on the floor is the same knife which I have seen you sharpening on your boot in the courtyard."

For the moment, Peppo could think of no other lie to serve him, without disclaiming ownership of the knife, which was his most cherished possession.

"Yes, that is mine; give it to me!" he said sullenly.

Clifford shook his head, and locked the knife in a drawer of his desk. "Not yet," he answered. "Tell me the truth, my boy; you can't be any worse off. This is a matter of vendetta?"

Peppo hesitated, looking furtively at the man who questioned him. He had seen this big, broad-shouldered American many times on the streets. He had even regarded him as a possible victim for his deft fingers. It was strange to hear him talking in his own familiar dialect, however; uncanny that he should so readily understand the truth.

Clifford's face was kindly, and his eyes twinkled good-naturedly, inviting trust and confidence. Peppo had always lived by his wits, and all the good that was in him would not have overburdened a fly. There is one obligation which the lowest Neapolitan vagabond recognizes, however, and that is fidelity to accomplices, and somehow Clifford seemed to have become one.

"Yes, it is vendetta," Peppo acknowledged, pointing to the still visible marks on his face. "The man was responsible for that, and I'll get him yet. I chased him in here last night, and I can't tell you just what happened. I thought I had him, and the next thing I remember I was tied up in that hole."

"He struck you?" asked Clifford.

Peppo's sallow face flushed, and his black eyes turned red. "He peached and made another man strike me!" he exclaimed viciously. "This is none of your business, mister; I haven't swiped anything here. Give me back my knife and I'll go." He tried to rise from the couch; but he was so stiff that he winced from the pain.

"I think you had better keep quiet, my boy," said Clifford kindly. "You needn't tell me any more unless you want to. If your story is straight, I won't hand you over to the *carabinieri*. You are in no shape to go out now."

Peppo's ratlike eyes looked at him suspiciously. "I don't think you'll want me here, mister," he said. "My story is straight; but I'm not."

Clifford laughed, and offered him a cigarette. "That's the truth, anyway," he said. "I've seen you, or a dozen like you. You're one of the gang on the traveling-bag lay." Clifford had used the thieves' expression, which is untranslatable. Peppo gave a start of astonishment. "Who are you, mister?" he demanded fearfully.

Clifford was quick to note and take advantage of the impression he made. "Never mind who I am; but I'm a bad man to fool with," he said threateningly. "You can't pull the wool over my eyes, and I can tell you who struck you. There is only one hand in Naples that could leave that trade-mark on your face, and it belongs to Don Alessandro Vitello. He is a friend of mine."

Peppo was dumb with astonishment, and Clifford waited, watching him closely.

"You won't give me away—anyway, not until I've got Cherubini!" implored the little thief piteously. "He'll do for me for that; but I'll die happy."

Clifford nodded comprehendingly. "It's Cherubini, is it?" he asked. "What if I should tell you that he is also a friend of mine?"

Peppo's expression became more ratlike than ever. "Is he?" he demanded, and Clifford realized that those small black eyes had discovered what Don Alessandro had failed to detect; for the hand, helpless as it was, had made a quick movement to where the knife should have been.

"Yes, he is, Peppo," he answered quietly. "So good a friend that I value his life quite as much as I do my own; and I don't intend to let you take it. Keep quiet; you are helpless."

Peppo scowled viciously. "You don't dare hand me over to the police," he said.

"I dare anything; but I don't intend to," answered Clifford. "I can take care of myself. See here, Peppo; I'm sorry he struck you. It wasn't my fault. I should have prevented it if I could. I don't mean to let you kill me for another's fault, however; nor do I wish to punish you for your stupidity. Here, I'll show you how much I fear you."

He unlocked the drawer and took out the knife. Peppo's eyes glistened as Clifford handed it to him, and he caressed it lovingly, after assuring himself that it had suffered no harm.

"You can keep it," continued Clifford contemptuously. "I don't fear a man who refuses to exact his vengeance from the one who has really struck him and skulks around to square himself by stabbing an innocent one. If I were doing it, I'd go to headquarters."

Peppo fairly shriveled up at the suggestion.

"Don Alessandro!" he exclaimed. "A priest!"

Clifford nodded, and looked the little thief squarely in the eyes. "Yes, priest or no priest; if he ever strikes me, I shall do my best to kill him," he said; and there was not the slightest mental reservation, for he knew that if it came to blows between them it would be a matter of life and death. "I'm a better man than you are, Peppo; just remember that. You will do exactly as I tell you, and if you ever raise your hand against me, I'll kill you for the rat you are. I'm going to keep you here until it suits me to let you go; but I'll promise you that you will get all the vengeance you are entitled to—even if I don't let you murder Cherubini. I'll make you more comfortable than you were last night, but I'm going to keep you locked up in the same place. And if you don't keep quiet, I'll gag you."

Peppo started to protest, but Clifford cut him short. "I shall not starve you," he said comfortingly; and, calling his servant, he directed the purchase of a generous supply of food and wine.

After Peppo had satisfied his hunger, Clifford locked him up securely; then, stretching himself on the couch which the Rat had vacated, he slept with the consciousness that he had sown seed which might bear good fruit.

Left Paw greeted Cherubini with little show of cordiality when they met at the osteria a few hours later; and, for a moment, Clifford believed that the man had become suspicious of him. It was only Left Paw's habitual ill temper, aggravated by disappointment, however; and he made no effort to conceal the cause of it.

"If we're going on the booze, you'll have to foot the bill," he said, turning his pockets inside out. "I expected to be dripping gold pieces; but I struck a drought."

Clifford jingled his money audibly. "I've been playing in luck, and I'm good for it," he answered, confirming his statement by ordering a bottle of the best wine which the osteria afforded. He studied his companion carefully as the proprietor himself opened the bottle and filled the glasses. Left Paw's expression, at no time prepossessing, was unusually sullen and vicious.

"Didn't you make good?" he asked, after his guest had swallowed the wine thirstily and refilled his glass.

Left Paw finished half of the second glass before answering. "I thought I had," he drawled. "I thought I'd made it a cinch that I'd get what I was after; but the *padre* turns me down. Nothing doing until I've done something else, and only enough coming to me to keep my belly full. What has he done for you?"

"Not as much as I could have done for myself. Probably more than he'll ever do for you."

Left Paw's eyes glistened. "See here, Cherubini; do you know anything?" he demanded fiercely.

Clifford leaned across the table. "Why didn't they let you go on to New York—why did you have to leave the ship at Gibraltar and come back here?" he asked, his knowing expression giving an added significance to the question.

Left Paw looked at him stupidly, trying to guess his meaning. Clifford was wise enough to keep silent and give him time, convinced that his suspicion would be aroused.

"How did you know I wanted to go to New York?"

"Never mind how I know; but I know why you wanted to go. There's that little matter of business to be settled with Carrot-top. I suppose you don't know that the New York police have found the Salipi swag, and claim that with it are——" Clifford paused, and winked knowingly.

Left Paw's expression grew more puzzled. "Well, what?" he demanded. "Nothing they can fasten on me; for I didn't have the stuff more than half an hour."

"But I'm afraid Conforti flimflammed you when you believed that you were holding out on him," answered Clifford, with just such a touch of derision in his voice as he knew would be irritating. "They found the papers."

Left Paw was irritated by the suggestion, and his vicious eyes looked dangerous. His left hand made an involuntary movement toward his breast pocket—a movement that clearly indicated he had the stolen papers with him.

Clifford's hand dropped carelessly to his coat pocket, where his fingers caressed a vial which contained a solution of chloral hydrate. A moment later, the hand was raised to signal for another bottle of wine. "Found the papers, eh?" And Left Paw laughed scornfully. "Rot! Conforti never had his hands on 'em. I knew they meant something, and that he'd try to swipe all my credit. I wouldn't have held out on anything worth money; but I wanted 'em to prove that I turned the trick."

Clifford, still angling, nodded; and refilled their glasses from the fresh bottle.

"Of course, they're not worth money; but they may mean a lot to you," said Clifford. "The *padre* plays favorites, and he's all for Conforti. He is hot about the jewels being found; that's why you didn't get the glad hand after doing your work."

"I haven't seen him; my business is with Lupocino," said Left Paw incredulously.

Clifford had guessed as much; for he believed that it was Lupocino who dealt with the more violent tools which the Camorra employed.

"Yes, Lupocino gives you your orders; but who gives Lupocino his, and who dictates the rewards and punishments?" he asked, leaning so far over the table that his body for a moment hid the wineglasses. That moment sufficed to empty the contents of his little vial into Left Paw's glass, and when he straightened up he rattled on before his companion had time to answer his question. "It's headwork that pays," he said derisively. "Your hand can be employed time and again without bringing you much; you can do for others what you did for Ralston until some day you get caught at it; but the head that plans it all will never be involved. You might, if you were chicken-livered, squeal on Lupocino; but even if you dragged him down it wouldn't hurt

the main guy. They're making a monkey of you, Left Paw; you've turned two good tricks for them, and what have you got out of it? Just the privilege to go on and turn a lot more; that's all."

His companion listened in sullen silence, sipping his wine with the deliberation of a man whose first craving is satisfied.

Clifford, watching him narrowly, went on romancing on what he believed to be a foundation of fact; dropping seeds of mistrust and suspicion on soil which had been well fallowed by disappointment to receive it. The wine had already begun to take effect, and Clifford knew that the chloral hydrate which he had dropped into this last glass would, in the next half hour, finish the work it had commenced. It was not until he saw the last drops of it disappear between his victim's lips that he ventured on his climax, and he knew that the suggestion, which would be the last before Left Paw sank into temporary oblivion, would be the first to recur to him when consciousness returned.

"Left Paw, you'll never get the reward which they have held before your eyes," he said earnestly. "I know; for they have talked before me. They have discovered that you held out on them; they use you now to do work which no other tool is brave enough to undertake; but when that work is finished you will get what they have decreed for you—that which comes to a man who may have served them faithfully in a hundred things, but fails in one."

Left Paw was partially stupefied; but even wine and drugs combined could not make him oblivious to the danger which Clifford suggested. He was defiant; but it was the defiance of the beast at bay, and his hand instinctively went to his knife.

"Curse them; they haven't only me to answer to, if they don't play fair!" he snarled. "I've got my people, too—those who would use their knives on the *padre* or the devil himself if harm came to me. The Crab; Peppo, the Rat; a dozen others, who would remember and pay my score."

"What of Peppo?" asked Clifford curiously. Left Paw's eyes, which had shown red, were growing heavy, and he looked at his questioner stupidly.

"Peppo, Peppo," he answered thickly. "Peppo's all right. He's a good boy—my boy—I've staked him many a time—good pal, and that sort of thing. Die for me if I asked him." His eyes grew heavier and heavier, his speech thicker and thicker.

Beckoning to the proprietor, Clifford quickly paid for the wine.

"It's too strong for him; I'll get him into the air," he said; and, rousing Left Paw from his seat with no little difficulty, he guided his unsteady footsteps to the street.

An hour later, Left Paw, apparently very drunk, was carried into an inconspicuous little osteria on the Torre del Grecco Road, and Clifford paid in advance liberally for his care, and gave injunctions that he was to be detained if he awakened.

That night, when Clifford, in his make-up as Cherubini, appeared at the priest's house, he was prepared to carry the first stage of his experimentation to a successful conclusion. He had carefully perused the papers which had been in Left Paw's pocket, and he now felt that he had found the thread which would lead him from the labyrinth into which his double identity had brought him.

Don Alessandro's ill-tempered expression gave way to smiles, his small eyes glistened, and his great hand was laid approvingly on Clifford's shoulder; for the very first bath brought success, and it was virgin white paper which was held up for inspection. A half dozen others followed it; and, after they had been hung up to dry, the priest quickly extinguished the lights, and led the way to his study.

"Cherubini, there has been unfortunate delay; but your result has justified my confidence in you," said Don Alessandro, as he placed writing materials on the table. "The worst of it is over; but there is plenty to do yet.

Let me have a sample of your skill in penmanship." He unfolded a paper which was covered with the scrawling handwriting that had become so familiar to Clifford in the last few days.

Clifford took a pen in his hand, and studied the writing carefully. Of the contents of the paper he could make no sense; for it was apparently written in cipher; and, although the words themselves were Italian, their arrangement conveyed no coherent meaning.

"You wish me to copy this gibberish?" he said interrogatively, and Don Alessandro grinned and nodded.

"It will do as well as anything else for practice; perhaps better, for your mind will not be distracted from the details," he said. "That isn't gibberish, my boy, except to the uninitiated. It's a cipher which I was clever enough to read; the secret it contains put me on the track of all the rest. If I hadn't been badly served, there would never have been all this bother."

Clifford had no desire to be put to a severe test; he knew that for a night or two he could gain time on one pretext or another, and that it would require less than that for him to win or lose the game on which he had entered. He beat a little tattoo on the table with his pen point, and shook his head.

"*Padre,* your method is wrong," he objected. "Let me use this paper and as many more as you like for models to study the formation of the letters and words; but don't waste my time by making me produce useless material. Give me the form of the paper you wish me to make out; let my hand gain facility in writing those very expressions so that they will come naturally from my pen when I come to make the final copy."

The priest shook his head obstinately. "No; you will do it my way," he said sharply.

Clifford shrugged his shoulders, and, dropping the pen on the table, rose from his chair.

"You've tried your way before without much success until you called me in to try mine," he retorted. "Go as far as you like, and when you are tired of it, let me know. I'm not going to cramp my fingers doing useless work."

Don Alessandro's small eyes glittered dangerously, and he spread another paper on the table, and motioned to Clifford to look at it. It was one of those curious modern documents where symbols took the place of names; but little blank spaces through the body of it had not been filled, and the signatures at the bottom were lacking.

"That paper will be completed tomorrow," said Don Alessandro quietly. "When you have gone so far along the road with me it is not well to dictate to me. I have told you that there would be reward at the end of it; it is just as sure that a paper like this will contain your name if you falter on the way."

"In other words, in spite of the fact that I have demonstrated my greater technical knowledge, I must do things your way, even at the risk of detection and exposure," expostulated Clifford. "You talk about reward for success; but it is I who would have to pay the piper for failure. It isn't good enough, *padre;* I'm not in the same class with Left Paw or Peppo."

Don Alessandro looked at him searchingly. He was unaccustomed to fearless resistance, but impressed by it, perhaps because of its novelty.

"No, you are not of that class," he admitted. "Cherubini, I have sometimes wondered just how I should classify you. You are unlike any man I have ever met, and you are full of contradictions. I should not argue with you; I should command, and you would obey or be crushed—if it were not for one very rare quality which I recognize in you instinctively."

Clifford looked at him without flinching, but the hand in the side pocket of his jacket clasped the butt of the flat automatic pistol.

"It would be a foolish workman who destroyed a valuable tool because it could not be made to do the impossible," he answered.

"It is not that; there are many skillful counterfeiters," replied the priest earnestly. "What I value in you more

than your skill is the quality of fidelity —the rarest, in my experience, in men." Clifford was surprised; but the priest was very evidently in earnest, and he smiled as he drew a paper from his pocket. "I believe that you would be faithful, at the cost of any sacrifice, to a trust," he continued. "Jesuitical, perhaps; but true as the magnetic needle to the cause you had pledged your word. Here is an evidence of my belief in you; if you should betray me, my life would not be worth a pin's fee."

He laid the paper on the desk; and, for a moment, Clifford was tempted to protest, to refuse to read it; but one glance at the crafty, sensuous face steadied him.

Yes, he was faithful, and at no mean sacrifice and risk; but not to this perjured sensualist who used the cloak of his holy office to hide the extortioner, the blackmailer, and the thief. Those great hands which unfolded the paper might be technically guiltless of murder; but Clifford knew that the scheming of that crafty brain was behind half the organized crime of Naples and Italian New York.

To the American, anything which savored of treachery was repugnant; but he recognized no obligation of fidelity to this man who had used him for his own purposes, and he knew that he owed his allegiance to the cause which had led him to gain Don Alessandro's confidence. Even then he hesitated; but it was the priest himself who pronounced his own sentence.

"Cherubini, that cipher put me on the track of certain papers," he said, pointing to the paper which Clifford had refused to copy. "Those papers, if they saw the light, would do something to lessen the stain which rests upon the memory of Lady Hamilton; for they would prove that, in spite of her tiger-like ferocity and absolute lack of morals, she possessed strongly the maternal protective instinct, and that in her later days she made an effort to repair some of the damage she had done. The rewards of her treachery were of little profit to her; history will tell you that she died an exile and in poverty. But when she died she left her illegitimate descendants rich; not only in property, but in power. They were the hereditary chiefs of the great organization she had perfected; much of the confiscated property of her victims was bestowed upon them. But my lady was sufficiently worldly wise to know that families deteriorate; and, in her later years, when the faces of the men she had sent to the scaffold and gibbet haunted her, she took means to allay the anger of at least one ghost—the spirit of that Domenico Cirillo, who alone of all the men she had known, withstood her charms, and valued his honor higher than her favors."

"He was hanged, was he not?" asked Clifford.

Don Alessandro nodded. "Yes; on the Mercato. His property was confiscated, his family reduced to beggary; and Lady Hamilton's hungry horde profited by their misfortunes. My lady was consistent then. No little thing like a scruple of conscience influenced her, but she acquired weakness with advancing years. Before she died, she made confession. It was not an open confession, but one which was to be produced when one of the descendants to whom she bequeathed both power and property was unable to hold the former; for, above all, she despised weakness. This confession was in the nature of a will—a will which made restitution to the heirs of Domenico Cirillo; and with it were the papers which granted his property to her. The destruction of those papers would make the grant ineffective; the property would revert automatically to those heirs, for no record of the transfer exists in the old Bourbon archives. That cipher told the hiding place of the will and the papers; they were concealed in the casket which held the jewels she bequeathed to her son, Salipi. The cipher itself was placed with the Cirillo papers in other archives. Papers which I found it necessary to consult when Giacomo, a direct descendent of Domenico Cirillo, became an object of solicitude to the Camorra. The last of the Salipis was a weakling; but even to re-

habilitate the memory of Lady Hamilton, we could not let that property go to a Cirillo. Therefore, I took measures to get hold of the papers. We obtained the casket and the jewels; but the papers were not there. Those papers, I am convinced, have been destroyed. *But you can prepare substitutes which will better answer my purpose.*" The last words came from the priest slowly, but with tremendous emphasis.

Clifford wondered how much his life would be worth if Don Alessandro knew that in his pockets were those original documents! He bent over the paper which the priest wanted copied, and his last compunction vanished.

"Don Alessandro, you have given me to understand that the reward of my labors would be participation in the benefits of the Camorra," he said gravely. "After what you have told me, I cannot see that the presentation of this paper would benefit any one save Don Alessandro Vitello, or that I should earn the gratitude of the society by doing the work."

The priest looked at him cunningly. "My boy, why assume the yoke of a society which knows no gratitude? You are correct. It is Don Alessandro who will reap the rewards. Giacomo Cirillo will need none of this property, for I shall have him placed beyond the reach of material reward before I leave the society to which I have been a slave—the priesthood, which I hate—to enjoy the liberty and luxury which this property will give me. I have enough of the secrets of the society to make me safe from its vengeance. I shall use its machinery to make me safe from any claim of Cirillo, and your skill will make me secure in possession. You will find me a more grateful master than the Camorra, which conveys reward only to demand greater service, and deals out punishment with no light hand for the slightest failure."

Much as Clifford had seen of depravity, he was fairly aghast. He had credited Don Alessandro with fidelity to at least one thing—the society which he served. He knew that he was recreant to his religious vows, and that in his personal life he was a sensualist, a gourmand, and a libertine; but he had believed that the man's criminal practices and associations were to benefit the society which had so many faithful servants.

Clifford saw the whole plot—the murder of Hispali in New York by one of Don Alessandro's tools, and the manufacture of the false evidence which would fix the guilt on Cirillo. He believed that Cirillo also knew, but suffered in silence, misleading his own lawyers lest full confession would bring down the vengeance of the Camorra on his family.

But with this knowledge, Clifford realized his own helplessness. The evidence which he had gathered was not of the slightest value in a court of law. It was only his own testimony which would bear weight; and he knew that once his double identity was known, he would never live to give it.

Ralston's murderer would never be brought to justice. Don Alessandro might be foiled in his attempt to seize Cirillo's property, but he would live to disgrace his calling, to be a power for evil until another opportunity presented itself to feather his nest. One look at that cruel, sensual face and the eyes already glistening with anticipation of what the future held for him, decided Clifford. He pointed to the paper on the desk, and inclined his head in assent.

"You are right; it is better to serve one man than many," he said quietly. "If we are both alive to-night, you shall have a copy of that paper which will serve your ends."

Don Alessandro clapped him jovially on the shoulder.

"We're two fairly healthy-looking specimens; so it's as good as done," he said. "Then no more of the black gown for me; and, my boy, we'll see life together."

XI.

Left Paw was still sleeping when Clifford called for him after leaving Don Alessandro; and, without fully

rousing him, he got him into a cab and conveyed him to his own apartment in the old palazzo. Clifford was reckless of followers. It was time he was playing for now—time to send to Trenton his first real report, time to arrange the dénouement of his stay in Naples as Winthrop Clifford to his own satisfaction.

He deposited Left Paw on the bed, where he promptly fell into a deep sleep. The wants of Peppo were then attended to. The boy accepted his imprisonment with the philosophic thought that he might be a lot worse off, and even grinned good-naturedly as his captor locked him up.

For Trenton, Clifford prepared a report of what he had discovered—a brief statement, but sufficient to permit the attorney to break down Cirillo's self-sacrificing reserve; for he knew that the accused man could clear himself if he would, and furnish information which would lead to the arrest of the real murderer of Hispali. That statement he carried to the consulate for transmission in the consular mail bag to the United States. Then, feeling that he had put his house in order against possible disaster to himself, he wrote a note to Don Alessandro, which he signed with his own name, asking him to come at once to the apartment in the old palazzo. He worded it so that he had not the slightest doubt of immediate acceptance; for he told the priest that he had the papers which had been found with the jewels in Cirillo's apartment.

Left Paw was still sleeping when Don Alessandro arrived; and Peppo, the Rat, whom Clifford had warned to keep silent, crouched in his dark prison at the end of the corridor. The servant had been dismissed, and Clifford himself opened the door for his visitor; taking the precaution to slip a hidden bolt to fasten it securely before he turned to greet him.

There was none of the cordiality in his manner which the priest had found when they met in the Fortunio, and the American's face was very grim as he motioned to a chair facing the light.

"Don Alessandro, I took the liberty of sending for you because you evinced a strange interest in the articles found in the rooms of Giacomo Cirillo in New York," he said, and something in his voice made the priest give an involuntary start. "Those papers were most curious—or, rather, the story which they contained."

The priest had regained his self-control, and betrayed only a courteous interest. "I can hardly see why it should have induced you to call me here?" he said interrogatively.

"Because your name occurs very prominently in it. Those papers replaced others which had been removed from the case; but the story gave a history of them, and stated that you were instrumental in the removal of the originals. It made many other charges against you, Don Alessandro—charges which it is fair that you should hear before they are made public."

The priest smiled sarcastically. "It is generous of you not to condemn me unheard. I can't imagine why my name should have been dragged into this, and it can only be a matter of malice. Would you mind giving me an outline of the story?" His voice was steady, and he spoke without undue haste; but the pitiless afternoon light betrayed a nervous twitching of his lips, and there was apprehension in the crafty eyes.

"It is not my place to condemn any one," replied Clifford. "My interest in this is a professional one; I have taken up the work which Ralston's death interrupted. Don Alessandro, those papers specifically state that you are a great power in the society which is known here as the Camorra, in New York as the *Mano Nero*." Clifford's tone had prepared him, and the priest did not flinch at the charge.

"Naturally an absurd charge on the face of it," he said.

"It would seem so, considering your cloth," assented Clifford; but his voice belied the admission. "That wouldn't be the worst of it, however, Don Alessandro, for it further asserts that you were false to the society which you served; and, if tradition is to be be-

lieved, a recreant priest is commoner than a Camorra traitor."

The fat face glowed with anger. "Have you brought me here to insult me?" demanded the priest fiercely, half rising from his chair.

Clifford motioned imperatively for him to remain seated. "I have brought you here to give you the first hearing of this story," he answered. "You need not remain; but I warn you that if you go, the story will be public property as soon as the evening papers appear on the streets. I should advise you to listen."

Don Alessandro eyed his tormentor vindictively, as if he were calculating the advantages which might be gained by silencing him forever. While he waited for the decision, the American held his pistol just below the edge of the desk which separated them, the crook of his elbow not escaping the other's notice.

"Go on!" said the priest sullenly. "The thing is absolutely ridiculous; but it is easier to avoid a scandal than to quiet one."

"I thought you might look at it that way," answered Clifford dryly. "That's why I advise you to listen quietly. Don Alessandro, that story charges you with being the custodian of the Camorra archives of the past; the compiler of those of the present. It charges that it is your hand which registers the decrees of its council; and, more, that you have, on occasion, falsified those decrees for your personal profit. It is circumstantial. It supports the main charge with exact detail, giving the nature of the papers extracted from the archives and stolen with the Salipi jewels, your reason for being so anxious to obtain them, and the details of the killing of Salipi in New York by your confederate, Conforti. It gives all the particulars of that murder, and of the dragging of the body to Cirillo's office, together with your plan of manufacturing false evidence to strengthen the case against the accused man."

Don Alessandro listened quietly. "It would be more courteous—as you say that you have brought me here in fairness to myself—to state that the story merely alleges these things; not to assume that they are true," he suggested.

"All right; I'll accept the correction—*for the present*," assented Clifford, the added qualification intentionally insulting. "There are a number of other allegations. The most serious is that you were very much alarmed over the coming of Mr. Ralston to Naples, appreciating that he was on the right track, and liable to upset all of your plans. It further alleges that you took measures to make his mission abortive by employing one Alfredo Polisano, *alias* Left Paw, to kill him. The first attempt was a failure, and, according to this story, you learned that Ralston was about to return to the United States with, as you believed, very damaging evidence. Left Paw was ordered by you to take the same steamer and there finish the work which he had commenced. We have this much confirmation of that story—we know that Ralston died before the *Rutanic* reached Gibraltar, and that the cause of death assigned by the ship's surgeon was incorrect. That is the gist of the story."

"Which is absolutely false, from beginning to end," answered Don Alessandro quickly, but with no evidence of anger. "Of course, Mr. Clifford, your sense of justice will prevent you from giving such a story to the world without proof to sustain it. I should be put on the defensive, and, with the unfortunate anticlerical feeling which is developing so rapidly in Naples, I should be made a target for assaults against the church. No matter how completely my innocence might be vindicated in the end, it would do great harm."

"Don Alessandro, I am already convinced that several important details of that story are incorrect," said Clifford gravely.

"Then, it is fair to assume that the whole is no truer than the part," the priest argued. "I felt that I might rely upon your sense of justice."

"I am glad to hear you admit that, Don Alessandro, for it has not been easy for me to convince myself that I am entirely justified in what I am do-

ing. I must tell you that I believe the essential points of the story I have sketched for you are true. The one which I know to be false is the statement that you removed the original papers from the jewel case which Lady Hamilton had bequeathed to her son. You did not, Don Alessandro; *for you never had the chance!*"

The priest's self-control deserted him, and he started from his chair. But Clifford had been prepared before he spoke; and he no longer made pretense of concealment of his pistol. It was pointed steadily between his visitor's small eyes; its tiny muzzle appearing to them the size of a cannon.

"You keep your seat, and hold your hands in plain sight!" he continued sternly. "I'll tell you why you missed your opportunity, Don Alessandro. You were betrayed by one of your trusted tools, who removed those papers before the casket came into your hands."

The priest knew that he had nothing to gain by further pretense, and the mask of gentleness dropped away, revealing the tiger. "Conforti!" he snarled, and his thick fingers worked convulsively, as if they felt for the traitor's throat.

"No, not Conforti, *padre*—the American law will attend to his punishment for the crime of which he is really guilty. But he didn't throw you down. You made a sad mistake when you chose your tools for this work. You employed the wrong men. Left Paw understands the use of the knife, as evidenced by his murder of Ralston, and you should have confined him to his specialty. You see, his education has been neglected. He can't read or write; so the papers which he took from the jewel case before handing it over to Conforti meant nothing to him. He realized that they were not without value, however, and brought them to some one who could estimate it; to no less a person than Cherubini, whom you——"

"Cherubini!" exclaimed Don Alessandro; and even the threatening pistol could not keep him in his seat as the recognition flashed upon him. His face went ashen white, and Clifford's finger relaxed on the trigger as the priest sank back again into the chair.

"I'll take the precaution of drawing your teeth, *padre;* you don't seem entirely able to control yourself," said Clifford warningly. Still keeping his man covered, he passed behind his chair and with his free hand removed a heavy revolver and a stiletto from beneath the black cassock. The cold muzzle of his own pistol against the nape of the priest's neck insured nonresistance, and also served to call back his shattered self-control.

"Well, what is it to be?" he demanded sullenly. For a moment he believed that Clifford had shown his hand only to make better terms. "If you have the original papers, the task should be easier, and you'll find me liberal."

"You are making another mistake, *padre,*" answered Clifford warningly, as he removed the cartridges from the confiscated revolver, and slipped them into his pocket. "You are not talking to Cherubini now; but to Winthrop Clifford, whose task it is to see that Ralston's murder is avenged and Giacomo Cirillo freed. You told me that you recognized fidelity in me. It is to that I am faithful; not to the priest who has disgraced his holy office, the Camorrist who has used the power of the society for his own ends, and attempted to cheat his accomplices. Enough of this story has gone to New York to restore Cirillo to liberty; enough of it will go to that mysterious council of six to insure a vacancy in the number when its justice is administered. *That's* what it is to be, Don Alessandro. The man who will furnish the proof to the council is here, in that room." He pointed to the bedroom door just as it opened, and Left Paw, yawning and rubbing his eyes, came out.

For just a moment he hesitated, and while Don Alessandro rose slowly from his chair, his eyes fixed on the face of the man who had betrayed him, Clifford slipped quietly into the narrow passage and unlocked the door of Peppo's prison.

"You may go now," he said quietly,

pointing to the passageway. Even as he spoke, a cry of rage came to them, followed by the confused noise of a desperate struggle. Peppo awaited no further permission; but darted through the passage to the study, Clifford following behind, his face white, his eyes burning, and his lips compressed to a thin, straight line.

Don Alessandro and Left Paw were locked together; each trying for the other's throat. The slim wiriness of the murderer's figure made it difficult for the priest, in spite of his great muscular strength, to hold him. Chairs had been overturned, the rugs were scuffed into the corners of the room, and many a piece of bric-à-brac went to smash as the two villains swayed desperately from side to side. It was still anybody's fight when Don Alessandro, to save a fall, placed his hand on Clifford's desk, his fingers closing about the barrel of the heavy pistol which the American had taken from him.

That great hand was raised, and, when it fell, the butt of the revolver crushed through Left Paw's skull, and the soul of one more scoundrel was freed from its earthly prison. For just an instant, the priest surveyed his work, and then, not wasting any of his precious breath in speech, he sprang for Clifford, who stood watching him from the passage doorway.

The revolver was raised to deliver another blow; but it dropped from his grasp, and Don Alessandro's huge bulk pitched forward to the floor, with Peppo's knife in his throat. The Rat had satisfied his vendetta.

"You can do what you like with me!" he exclaimed defiantly, as Clifford touched him on the shoulder. "I've paid him for the blow, and for Left Paw, too."

Clifford motioned for him to keep quiet as he quickly changed into the clothes of Cherubini. "Your vendetta isn't satisfied yet, Peppo," he said grimly, when a last glance in the glass satisfied him that his transformation was finished. "Ralston is paid for; Cirillo will be free; but you and the likes of you have got to exact payment for generations of oppression. We'll leave Clifford, the American, to account for this when it is discovered; but you will go with Cherubini, who will help you present those demands, and see that they are honored."

Peppo didn't in the least understand his real meaning; but he was quick to realize that he was to escape punishment, and accepted without question.

Clifford was waiting, his hand on the doorknob; but Peppo stooped and drew the knife from Don Alessandro's body. Then, prompted by the strange mixture of superstition and religion which makes the Neapolitan vagabond so difficult to understand, he reverently kissed the cross of the hilt before returning it to its sheath, and following his new protector to temporary oblivion in the seething mass of humanity in the Mercato quarter.

THE END.

THE GALLANTRY OF PAT

A VERY pretty Denver girl, who recently returned from abroad, tells of an amusing encounter with an Irish cabbie in Dublin. She had started out from her hotel to do some shopping, but decided instead to make a tour of the city on a jaunting car.

Arriving at the first car stand, and having selected the smartest-looking vehicle, she told the driver that she "wanted to engage him for the day."

Pat, never backward in paying homage to beauty, earnestly replied:

"Begorra, ma'am, you are welcome! I only wish it was for life!"

The Correspondent at Comunkus

By C. B. De Camp

The "nose for news" is a requisite for a successful newspaper man. But sometimes a lively imagination makes a pretty good substitute. It was so in the case of the correspondent whom Mr. De Camp tells about in this brisk little yarn

HIS name was T. L. Hibbins. Every little while he would stir out of a deep sleep and unload a thousand words about a "mysterious midnight marauder" that was preying upon the hen roosts of "this little village." Then he would drop off again to come to with fifteen hundred words beginning: "A drama of dark passion was enacted at a lonely farmhouse near this place last week." The hero of the drama, an unemployed Swede, after draining several bottles of stomach bitters, would start out to finish a hired girl with a knife, but before he could get any action he would fall into the cistern. Curtain.

Or else it would be a story about a cow. The cow was not a tractable cow. It had a way of browsing on the railroad track and when the 10:02 local came along it stayed right on the track until the train almost ran into it, and "what might have been a serious wreck was narrowly averted."

That was the kind of a correspondent we had at Comunkus, and that was the kind of stuff that used to come reeling into the office of the Continental Press all afternoon at three-quarter cents a word, day press rate. If Hibbins could have gotten that much from a publisher there really would have been something in it for him. The Continental Press, out of habit, mailed him a check for three dollars every Saturday. There was a time when they hoped Hibbins would get mad and quit, but doubtless three dollars goes far in Comunkus.

Once Galacar wrote him, gently criticising his tendency to overplay, and telling him that if there wasn't any news in Comunkus not to worry; there were other places. Apparently Hibbins regarded this as a challenge, for the next day he sent in a column about a five-legged calf. Whereupon Galacar threw up his hands and gave Hibbins his head.

Comunkus was one of those towns that they print in the date line without giving the State, because if you know where it is you know there is only one; and if you don't know, it doesn't make any difference. It was not fifty miles from New York, but you could get to Baltimore in less time. At the last junction for Comunkus you took a mixed freight. How we ever came to have a man there is a mystery locked in the breast of the manager before Galacar. No one else had committed that indiscretion, and Hibbins had the field to himself. We handled the only original Comunkus dispatches—and that is how it all happened.

The defalcation and flight of Theron Miller, president of a savings bank in New York, was a big story, not only in New York, but all over the country. Miller had stolen a fortune and gotten away with it. He was a pillar of society, with a flat-topped derby and a secret passion for speculation; and when he walked off one night with the savings in a grip, about twelve hundred of the plain people had to begin

all over again. Small wonder it was a big story.

Two days passed and then people began to recognize Miller from the Boston docks to Omaha. He had been talking to the skipper of a Rio brig; he had boarded a sleeper for St. Paul. But there was nothing in it.

These rumors of the defaulter's whereabouts loosened speculation in the office of the Continental Press—speculation which drifted idly over the desks until it was cut by Galacar's cold "Forget it. He's near home." And he strangled the Miller rumors with a hard hand. The news manager never explained his opinions; he just expressed them. And when he was right he was all right, and when he was wrong, well, we were all too delicate to mention it.

A week passed, and then, one morning when things were at full hum, and Trefoyle, in the cable room, was all cocked and primed to report Miller's arrest at Liverpool, or Cherbourg, Kenealy, who worked the south wire, dropped his hands off his old No. 2 machine and remarked:

"Operator at Elizabeth says Miller is at Comunkus."

"Where did he get it?"

Kenealy opened his key, and after a moment, replied in that tone of aloofness peculiar to operators:

"I don't know. He says that's all he heard."

"Comunkus, eh?" murmured Galacar absently. Then he resumed his perusal of the morning extras.

It was one of those wildcat flashes which play continually along press wires, sometimes the premonitory breath of big events; sometimes only the gossip of an idle operator who has filched something from his sounder and talked about it, which is bad and got it wrong, which is worse. Now, however much a man may affect to despise these little anonymous whispers, they are warranted to poison his peace of mind, and before long Galacar began to fidget. Finally, he brushed aside the papers and called out to one of the imps who carried copy.

"Say, you, get downstairs and look out for extras and hurry up with them." Then, in a different tone, to the south-wire editor opposite him:

"Have we had anything from Hibbins lately?"

"No, the voice of Comunkus has not been heard for some days."

"Probably rolling a fresh pill," said the news manager as he took up his pencil. "Wonder what he would do with a piece of real news?" He wrote rapidly and threw this across the table:

T. L. Hibbins, Comunkus.
Reported Miller is at Comunkus. Is there anything in it? Rush reply. Galacar.

"There might be something in it at that," he added, as he released the lever of the messenger call. "I guess I'll let it go."

Whatever it was that Elizabeth had picked up, linking the names of Miller and Comunkus, nothing more was heard of it. If the opposition were hugging a good thing they gave no sign; the officials of the despoiled bank had nothing new to say; the Pinkertons were mum, and our wires brought no rumors. By twelve o'clock we had forgotten all about it. Then we were turned upside down.

Galacar had "given lunch" on his own wire, the west, and had gone to the hooks for his coat and hat, when a messenger boy came plowing in and brought up under his waistcoat. Galacar took the telegram from him, abstractedly tearing it open as he walked to the door. He read it and forgot all about lunch.

"Hey!" he bellowed to his operator: "Get the west again. We've got Miller."

And Galacar came running back to the table with his hat falling over his eyes. "Hibbins has made good," he said, throwing the dispatch to the south-wire editor. It read:

Have just found out that Miller is here. Will send you a good story soon.
T. L. Hibbins,
Comunkus.

Galacar was leaning over the shoulder of the west-wire operator. "Got Pittsburg, all right? Well, then:

"New York, May 10," he dictated. "Theron Miller, the defaulting bank president of New York, has been located at Comunkus. News of his arrest may be expected at any time."

The news manager had scarcely finished before the message was on manifold paper and going around the hooks. All the instruments were dancing merrily, and the south-wire editor on the phone was bawling the news to the banks, the stock ticker, and the Wall Street news agency. In five minutes we had those few words pretty well scattered to the four points. You would not have known it for the lunch hour.

"Funny he didn't give us his arrest," said the south-wire editor, coming back and righting the chair he had knocked over.

"Funny he didn't wait till he had written a book before he gave us anything," retorted Galacar. "I figure," he continued, "that Elizabeth picked that tip up from a Pinkerton message, and either Miller was under arrest then or he will be before night. Whatever it is, we'll get it soon enough, and we've got a corner on it."

Hibbins was the hero of the hour in the Continental Press office. Galacar said that he might be a farmer, but he was all right. Hibbins, he said, had never made a hit because he had never had a chance; you couldn't tell about men that way. It was the man who was there when you wanted him who counted. And somehow we were allowed to infer that the news manager in his inscrutable wisdom, had been keeping a correspondent at Comunkus against this very emergency. He said you never could tell when you were going to get returns for the outlay in this business; and one thing, you couldn't afford to scrimp on men. To all of which we shook our heads and said, "That's so," and, "That's right."

Meanwhile an hour had passed and we had nothing to add to our bare, though brilliant, bulletin. Galacar began to watch the clock; then he began to growl. Finally, he wired Comunkus.

Rush facts. Never mind story.

But before this message left the office, a small, blue-clad boy poked a fat envelope in front of the news manager. He tore it open and exclaiming, "Here's more Comunkus now!" spread the big, damp press form out in front of him.

"Well, have they got him?" snapped the south-wire editor.

But Galacar was rising out of his chair, the red streaks spreading over his temples. "What'n hell's all this!" he shouted, his eyes still on the dispatch. Then he flung it from him and sank to his chair, bringing his fist down after him onto the table. "Read it. Oh, read it!" he groaned.

And the south-wire editor gathered the telegram to him and read:

COMUNKUS, June 10.

There was much winking and wagging of heads in this little village to-day when the news got abroad that Comunkus' erstwhile and, to put it mildly, eccentric mayor, Ezra Miller, had showed up at his old home last night after a protracted, not to say, sensational, sojourn in New York.

Mr. Miller does not look as though his trip had benefited him greatly, but he evidently had an exciting time at the metropolis, if the accounts of his doings in one of the New York papers which recently reached Comunkus can be relied upon.

The ex-mayor said to your correspondent to-day, when he perceived that it was useless any longer to attempt to conceal the fact of his presence in our midst: "The stories printed about me are all lies." These stories were to the effect that Mr. Miller had been arrested for drunkenness and creating a disturbance in a fashionable Eighth Avenue restaurant.

According to the ex-mayor, the police treated him with great brutality, and he is about to take steps to secure satisfaction for the personal indignities to which he was subjected. Mr. Miller is a very powerfully built man, standing six feet, two inches in his stockings. He is a devotee of the manly art of self-defense, and if he should decide to secure satisfaction in person, perhaps some of the members of New York's "finest" had better begin taking boxing lessons.

T. L. HIBBINS.

There it was in black and white, or rather in blue, blurred, copying ink—the whole excruciating, preposterous blunder. "Ezra Miller, erstwhile mayor of Comunkus."

Certainly it was a black eye for the

news manager, he who had been turning back fake Miller rumors for a week, now bound hand and foot to a barefaced "pipe." The bulletin was in print on both coasts by this time, with all editors looking pleasant, and expectantly waiting for more. The south-wire editor let the sheet fall to the desk.

"Wouldn't it kill you?" said Galacar, and his voice squeaked. "Let me see it again."

He stretched over and brought the telegram under his face, sunk in two hands. After a space he looked up. "What's it all about?" he asked vacantly.

"All about the mayor of Comunkus," replied the south-wire editor. "Didn't you see the funny yarn about it in the *Hurricane?* How the big Reub came up to the city, got tight as an Indian, and then tried to rough-house an uptown café? They had a lovely time getting him into the patrol wagon. The next morning he sniveled in court, and said somebody must have drugged him. There were a lot of funny pictures, but it didn't say anything about his being the ex-mayor. None of the other papers had anything about it."

"And Hibbins thought I wanted to follow that story up? That I wanted a local end to it? And that bulletin's been out an hour!"

The news manager grabbed the sheet and flung in to the old man in the back office. When he came out again, it might be confidently asserted that T. L. Hibbins had ceased to be a correspondent of the Continental Press.

"What are you going to do?" asked the south-wire editor.

"Do!" bellowed Galacar; and then he rose to sublime heights. "Why," very softly, "I think I'll tell him not to send any more Miller. You remember his dispatch said 'more.'" And he wrote out and filed the following:

T. L. Hibbins, Comunkus.
Have all we want of Miller story. Congratulations.

It was a beautiful chance to remind the news manager that "it was the man who was there when you wanted him who counted." But none of us, not even the south-wire editor, had the heart to do it.

That was at half-past one. Galacar got down quickly enough from the sublime heights, and became as savage as a trapped wolf. Everybody felt it and was conspicuously busy. If the news manager asked for the scissors or a paper, we all tried to hand it to him at once. The office boys made a great deal of noise to show they were working. The operators alone were indifferent to the charged atmosphere. But nothing affects operators except a bad wire or a "bug" or a slow taker. Then they kick up an awful row.

About two o'clock a boy brought in an extra served by the Opposition. Across the top in box-car letters was "Fake Miller Report." In the small print it read:

There is still no news of Miller's whereabouts, though a local press association this afternoon circulated a wild-cat report that he had been located at Comunkus.

Galacar threw the paper at the water cooler.

Then our clients, the dear fair-weather friends, began to ask how about it. First came the Wall Street agency on the phone. They wanted more Miller, and they wanted it right away. They also wanted to know where we got that bulletin. Galacar replied that we got it from our special correspondent at Comunkus, and that we ought to get more any minute, but that communication with Comunkus was difficult; there was something the matter with the wire. Then he slammed up the receiver without saying "good-by," and came back to his seat mopping his face.

On his desk lay three snowy sheets, which had been wafted over from the operators' table. On them were penciled requests for Miller's arrest in a neat running hand. The news manager read these slowly and let them sail one by one to the floor.

The next thing was the appearance in person of the managing editor of a local afternoon paper that we had been

serving on trial for a week. He looked almost too neat to be a newspaper man, and when he asked, in all his clean-collared, eye-glassed dignity, if he might see the original dispatch that had been received relative to the whereabouts of Miller, the defaulter, a hush fell upon us all.

The request was just insulting enough to make Galacar cool and self-possessed.

"Why, certainly," he replied courteously, "here it is." And he drew Hibbins' first dispatch from the file spike.

The managing editor examined it at some length and then put it down, remarking with faint embarrassment: "Ah, yes, yes; but you see I had to make sure. I am glad it is all right."

"Yes," said Galacar, "it's all right, but it's the wrong Miller."

And while the managing editor was still groggy from the blow Galacar pushed him into the back office and shut the door.

It was now nearly three o'clock, and there was a scandalous amount of trouble in the air. It seemed that something would have to drop pretty soon. Galacar sat writing. He would write a few lines, look them over with pencil poised, and then, crushing the paper into a wisp, would thrust it under the table. He did this three or four times. Finally he finished a sheet and let it lie, touching it here and there with commas.

"How's that?" he asked gruffly, sliding the paper over to the south-wire editor who read:

NEW YORK, June 10.

A special dispatch from Comunkus says that Miller, the defaulter, who was located there this morning, has disappeared. No details are available at this time.

"That's not so bad," said the south-wire editor thoughtfully, "but it looks thin."

"So does a sick cat," said the news manager, "but can you suggest anything else except to say that we are sorry, but we made a mistake?"

The south-wire editor could not suggest anything else.

"Then put it on manifold and let it go."

Galacar watched the south-wire editor's stylus running over the yellow "flimsy," and when he saw it make the double cross at the bottom, he rose and roared:

"Copy here! Bulletin! Get this around lively now!"

There was a scurrying of feet, but that bulletin never got out.

For before Galacar could sit down again, the west-wire operator sang out:

"Pittsburg wants Miller's arrest."

"You tell Pittsburg to——"

"Says the Opposition's got it bulletined."

"Where?" There was the smack of a chair back on the floor.

"At Comunkus."

"Forget it!" from Galacar.

"Why, they're stealing our break!" from the south-wire editor.

Then Kenealy, at the south wire:

"Philadelphia says the Opposition has got a bulletin that Miller's arrested. Have we got it?"

"Hold on there!"

Galacar was dashing along the desks, tearing the bulletins he had just written from the editors' hooks, and snatching it from in front of the operators.

"Now, what's the matter?" He stood with a huge ball of the yellow tissue in his fist, dominating the confusion. "Is this a kid?" He loomed threateningly over the south-wire operator.

Kenealy did not appear to hear him. His expression was all in his ear. "Says it's a Trenton dispatch," he remarked indifferently. "Detectives have just come in there with Miller from Comunkus."

"Hooray! We're safe, we're safe!" yelled the south-wire editor.

Galacar stared at him fixedly. "But where is Trenton?" he asked.

For answer there came the wailing singsong of an office boy: "Trenton on the phone; Trenton on the phone! Wants the manager quick!"

Galacar reached the telephone in two jumps.

"Hello! Is that you, Meyer?"—

Meyer was our Trenton correspondent—"Did you see him? Is that straight? Just a second.

"Get ready to take this," he called to the south-wire editor. "We'll beat them with the story, too."

The south-wire editor seated himself at Galacar's side, stylus in hand.

"All ready? Date Comunkus."

And then Galacar, standing at quarter-face, with his eyes on his assistant's upright hair, began to dictate:

"Theron Miller was arrested here early this afternoon by Pinkerton detectives. (Got that?) He was traced to Comunkus by an express package which he attempted to send to a Philadelphia steamboat company. (All right?) The Detective Bureau in New York was notified this morning and two of their men left at once for Comunkus. Paragraph.

"When placed under arrest, Miller admitted his identity and agreed to accompany the detectives to New York."

"Yep," from Galacar into the telephone. "Is that all? Wait a minute." Then to the south-wire editor: "Wind that up there and let her go. Meyer has got some more."

"Copy here! Bulletin!" A boy caught the "flimsy" book in the air.

"Make it 'add bulletin,'" said Galacar, as the south-wire editor squared himself at a fresh book. "All ready?"

"Miller came to Comunkus——"

"What's that? *Five days ago!* All right."

"——Five days ago, and gave it out that he was a lawyer named Spicer—S-p-i-c-e-r—from Philadelphia, and that he was looking up records in the local cemetery. Paragraph.

"No one in Comunkus suspected that Miller was other than the man he pretended to be. (Got that?) He hired a room in the house of the local undertaker, and when placed under arrest the undertaker attacked the detectives, but was not arrested, as it is believed he was entirely ignorant of Miller's identity. (Got that?)"

"Is that all?" into the phone. *"What's that?"*

Galacar hung up the receiver.

"The undertaker's name," he said, "is Hibbins, T. L. Hibbins."

AFTER MANY CENTURIES

ISRAEL is coming into its holy of holies, from which it has been barred for many long and bitter centuries. As one result of the new régime in Turkey, all religions are officially recognized on an equal basis, and at last the Jews are allowed to enter the site of their ancient temple at Jerusalem and there worship according to their creed.

Since the destruction of the second temple by the Romans under Titus, in A. D. 70, no Jew has been permitted on the spot. For twelve hundred years Moslem soldiers, stationed at the gates, have slain or turned away all who sought to enter; and the devout Jews have had no other privilege than to weep and pray outside the walls.

Within the past generation visiting Christians have been allowed, under guard and for payment of a fee, to enter the beautiful Mosque of Omar, which stands where the great Temple of Solomon stood.

Beneath its lofty dome is the wonderful rock of numberless traditions, revered alike by Jews, Christians, and Mohammedans. Late in July of last year the Jews were allowed to enter and worship for the first time. So 1909 has become a notable year in Jewish history.

The Red House on Rowan Street

By Roman Doubleday

Author of "The Hemlock Avenue Mystery," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Henry Burton visits the Underwood family to induce Miss Leslie Underwood to reconsider her refusal to marry Philip Overman, the son of a dear friend of Burton's. He finds the town arrayed against Doctor Underwood and his son, Henry, because of a series of mysterious pranks and depredations, culminating in the highway robbery of Orton Selby, a contractor with a violent grudge against Henry, laid to their door in anonymous handbills. The doctor invites a committee of investigation. On the day of Burton's arrival, Doctor Underwood sprains his ankle. Burton assists him, and learns of the annoyances to which the family has been subjected. He finds damaging evidence, which has been concealed in the doctor's study where it could be easily discovered. He convinces all the committee of the flaw in that sort of evidence except Orton Selby, who vows he will convict the doctor. Burton lies in wait, that night, in the hopes of detecting the person who "planted" the evidence. He sees Henry come in at an early hour in the morning. When he wakes, he finds an anonymous warning bidding him to leave. When he shows this to the doctor, the latter recognizes it as an attempt to imitate his own handwriting. Burton suspects Henry, when the servant tells that during the night the house of the Sprigg children, who were responsible for the doctor's accident, was burned to the ground. Burton finds the Spriggs baby had been saved from the fire, and tied in the bushes with a peculiar knot. The next night Mr. Hadley is found tied in his bed. Burton recognizes the knot used as the same which held the Spriggs baby. The cord is identified as the property of Henry Underwood, who is arrested and jailed. Burton discovers that Henry was in the garden with Miss Hadley at the time her father was tied, but she declines to bear witness to the fact. He also learns that Orton Selby is a rival suitor for Miss Hadley's favor. Noticing the peculiar knot, which has twice been used by the trouble-maker, on an Indian basket, Burton departs to learn who knew how to tie it.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TRAIL TO YESTERYEAR.

THAT afternoon, following a hint from Ralston, Burton made a point of interviewing Watson, the chief of police, on the subject of the old High Ridge disturbances which had been laid at Henry Underwood's door. He found it a sore subject. Watson was a decent fellow, and disposed to be fair-minded; but Henry Underwood was a red rag to him. The way in which the police force had been defied and outwitted, in the former outbreak, was not likely to soften their attitude toward the culprit in the present case. The hope of proving Henry guilty was evidently dear to the official heart, and Burton departed, feeling that there was no help to be looked for in that direction. The rigor of the law was all that the Underwood family could expect.

It was evening before he found the time and opportunity to take his basket to the Red House. Mrs. Bussey did not appear. Instead, it was Leslie, herself, who admitted him and conducted him to the surgery.

"See what a bargain I have found," said Burton, displaying his purchase.

The doctor gave it a casual glance. "An Indian basket, isn't it? And not a very good one."

"A very good one—for my purpose. I wish I had another. Do you know any one in town who could weave one for me?"

This story began in the issue of December 15, which can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price fifteen cents.

"No, I'm afraid not." The doctor made an obvious effort to respond to his guest's trivial interests.

"Are there any Indians living in or near town?"

"No. They were all corralled on the reservation years ago. There is a squaw who comes down from the reservation to sell bead work, and things like that, on the streets; but she is the only one I ever see nowadays."

"Yes, I got this basket from her today. But I want a mate to it. Is there any one in town who can weave in the Indian fashion?"

"I don't know of any one."

"Would you know if there was any one? Excuse the persistence of a tourist and a faddist."

Underwood aroused himself to a more genuine interest. "Why, if it is a matter that you have your heart set upon, I certainly would be glad to give you any information possible. But I don't believe there is any one in town who makes any attempt at that sort of work, or takes any interest in it. I should certainly know if any one made a profession of it, or even had a well-developed fad for it—to use your own word. Why? Is the basket rare?"

"I have never seen that particular knot before. What's more, I didn't know that the mid-continent Indians did that sort of weaving, at all. I should guess that it is the work of some one individual weaver and, possibly, those who have learned from her. Do you know any one in town who has a personal acquaintance with the Indians?"

The doctor smiled whimsically. "Our dear and cherished friend, Selby, has a first-hand acquaintance with them. When I first came to High Ridge, it was just a frontier settlement. The Indians were the free lances of the State. They still hunted in the northern woods, with much of their original freedom, and they came to town to do their trading, and to get what they wanted by a sort of proud and independent begging that came near to having the ethical weight of natural law. How could you refuse a fellow mortal a paper of tobacco when he came and took it out of your pocket? To take it back with a dignity matching his own, was something that required more ancestral training in dignity than most of us had. All the men who had a love for hunting came, sooner or later, to pick out some Indian who would act as scout and show him the best trails. There's an attraction about that sort of life."

"And Selby was one of them?"

"More than any of us. Selby and old man Bussey antedate my time. They were here when there was only a beginning of a town, and it was mostly wild country. Bussey was a born bohemian, who lived among the Indians, for years, like one of themselves. Even after he was married, he would go off for the whole summer, leaving his wife and the kid to shift for themselves. Sometimes he took Ben along, and Mrs. Bussey would come around and work for Mrs. Underwood."

"You linked Selby and Bussey together. Did he go among them, also?"

"He often went off with Bussey, but he went for the trades he could make, rather than for any innocent purpose like hunting. He was a mere boy when he began selling them calicoes, warranted to fade in the first wash, in exchange for muskrat and beaver skins. And he cheated them when he could, at that."

"Did he take any interest in Indian basket making?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Old man Bussey could probably have woven your basket for you, and put in some extra kinks of his own, in addition; but I never paid much attention to that sort of thing—old squaws' work!"

"I hope to convince you of its value and importance. If I went up to the reservation, would I find any of those old neighbors of yours?"

"You might, and you might not. The Indians do not live to be old, under the conditions of life that the white man provides for them. But it is more than probable that some of them are still alive."

"What does Selby pay Ben Bussey for that wood carving he buys?" Burton asked abruptly.

"I don't know," said the doctor, with a look of helpless surprise.

"You think my questions irrelevant," smiled Burton. "I was wondering if Selby cheated Ben as he used to cheat the Indians."

"Oh, I guess not. If he didn't take Ben's work, I don't know who would, in High Ridge. There isn't much demand for that sort of thing. I have always felt that Selby made a market for Ben out of old friendship."

"That's an amiable trait which I should hate to discover in Mr. Selby. It would be so lonesome. I wonder if it *is* friendship."

"Well—say merely old acquaintance, then. Selby as a boy was out and about with Bussey, and they naturally would have come to have a feeling of comradeship. Then Ben grew up, and Selby took him about as Ben's father had taken him before. Especially after Bussey disappeared. Ben was sort of a waif, and Selby took him along in his trips into the back country. I have no doubt he made him work for his keep, all right."

"Then Ben would be likely to know whether Selby learned weaving from the Indians, wouldn't he?" exclaimed Burton. "That's the way to find out! Can I talk to Ben Bussey?"

"Certainly. He sees people whenever he likes. That back part of the house, over the kitchen, is given over to them; and they are as independent there as if they lived in their own house. But why are you so curious about Selby's Indian experiences? If one is to believe gossip, he had more experiences than he would care to have remembered against him, nowadays. But you are not inquiring into his morals?"

"No—merely his skill." He hesitated a moment, and then explained: "I don't want to raise any false hopes; but I have an idea that the person who tied Mr. Hadley in his bed, and who braided the lilac branches together over the Spriggs baby, had learned weaving from the Indians. I would even go so far as to say that he had learned it from the same squaw who wove this basket I bought to-day. It's a peculiar knot—not at all a common one in such weaving, so far as I am acquainted with it."

The doctor looked serious. "I wonder. Unquestionably, Selby *might* have learned Indian weaving. But——"

"That wouldn't prove very much—no. But it would be something. Suppose you ask Mrs. Bussey to take me up to see Ben. His wood carving will supply a reason for my visit. And, incidentally, I'll find out what Selby pays him."

Mrs. Bussey was obviously both surprised and flattered at the request that she conduct this important visitor to her son's room. She had evidently taken Doctor Underwood's chaffing use of the title "doctor" as good earnest, and insisted upon regarding Burton as a famous physician.

"You can't do nothing for Ben, doctor," she said, pursing up her lips and shaking her head. "He's that bad nobody can do anything for him. Henry Underwood done for him, all right."

He found Ben Bussey in a wheeled chair near a window which, in the daytime, must command a pleasant view of the garden. Ben was a heavy-featured young man, somewhat gaunt and hollow-eyed from his confinement, but in no wise repulsive. His legs were wrapped in an afghan; but his hands, which held a piece of unfinished carving, were strong and capable looking. A table with the material for his work was drawn up beside his chair.

"Doctor Underwood happened to mention that you did wood carving," Burton said, drawing up a chair for himself, "and I asked if I might come up and see it. I'm interested in things of that sort. That's good work you are doing. How did you come to learn carving?"

"Just picked it up," Ben answered. He was looking at his visitor with an air of quiet indifference, as though the comings and goings of other people could have nothing vital to do with his isolated life.

"Ben's real smart with his hands," said Mrs. Bussey proudly.

"Do you find any market for your carving?"

"Selby takes it."

"Selby, the contractor," explained Mrs. Bussey. "Sometimes people want hand-carved mantels and cornishes, and things like that. He makes quite a bit that way, Ben does."

"Does Selby come here with his orders?"

Ben looked at him with a slow, peculiar smile. "I can't very well go to him."

"I asked because I had an impression that he was not on very friendly terms with the Underwood family, and I wondered if he would come to their house to see you."

"He don't see none of them," said Mrs. Bussey, with a lofty air. "He can come in by the side door, and right off here to Ben's room. The doctor says as Ben and I shall have this part of the house for our own—and little enough, too, seeing what Henry done to Ben."

"Is Selby an old friend of yours?"

"Guess we've known him as long as anybody. When my old man was alive, he used to take Ort Selby out into the woods hunting and trapping with the Indians. He was great for that, my man was."

Ben looked at his mother with a satirical smile. "He wasn't great for much of anything else, was he?"

"That's not for you to say," she retorted sharply. "Here you lay, and have everything done for you. You needn't say anything agin' your dad."

Ben picked up his tool and board with a contemptuous silence.

"That was before the Indians were put on a reservation, wasn't it?" asked Burton.

"Yes."

"How did they live—by hunting and fishing?"

"Yes."

"Anything else? Did they do any kind of work, like carving?"

"Red stone pipes, and things like that."

"And baskets?"

"Birch-bark baskets. To sell."

"Other baskets, too—didn't they? I have a lot of Indian baskets at home."

"Not from here," said Ben.

"No, you are right about that. But to-day I saw some baskets an Indian woman was selling at the station. They are made at the reservation, aren't they?"

Ben looked up, with the first sign of real interest he had shown. "That was Pahrunta. She comes down, sometimes, to sell the baskets that her mother makes. Her mother is Ehimmeshunka. She came from another tribe—many moons away, they said. She was stolen, I guess. She makes baskets like the Western Indians, not like the Indians here."

"You have seen her working, then?"

"Yes."

"Was that when you were with Selby?"

"Yes. My dad was chummy with Washitonka—brothers, they called each other. Ehimmeshunka was Washitonka's squaw."

"Did Selby learn how to make baskets like Ehimmeshunka?" asked Burton. Immediately he regretted that he had put the question so bluntly, for a surprised question came into Ben's face.

The young fellow fixed his sombre eyes on Burton for a moment before he answered curtly: "No."

And Burton knew at once that the answer was merely prompted by a desire to shut off questioning. He tried to turn the conversation into another channel.

"Is that work you are doing an order?"

"Yes."

"What is it for?"

"Bookcase."

"What does Selby pay you for a piece of work like that?"

Ben did not open his lips to reply. He merely looked at Burton, with a gaze like a blank wall.

"Unless he pays you a fair price," Burton continued, "I might be able to do something for you in some place

where there is more demand for that sort of work."

An unmistakable gleam of interest came into Ben's eyes, though he did not answer.

But Mrs. Bussey answered for him. "Do you hear that, Ben? He'll get you better prices. I told you all along that Selby wasn't paying you enough."

"What does he pay?" asked Burton.

"Whatever he likes," said Ben morosely.

Burton saw that he had touched a sensitive spot.

"And then he doesn't pay what he says he will," added Mrs. Bussey. "It's always 'Come next week,' and 'Wait a little.'"

"What does he pay for a piece of work like this?"

"One dollar—two dollars, maybe."

"Why, that's absurd! I'm sure I can get you ten to twenty times that for it. May I see it?"

Ben dropped the piece of wood he held, and Burton picked it up. It was intended for a panel in the side of a bookcase, and the design was cut out in low relief. It was a spirited sketch of an Indian with a bent bow drawn up to his shoulder.

"That's good," said Burton, in frank admiration. "Awfully good. Did you copy it, or design it yourself?"

"Just made it up."

"What is he shooting at?"

Ben glanced up with what was almost a smile. "Selby says he is shooting at the brave that has stolen his squaw." Then he lapsed back into his former attitude of sombre indifference. "I think he is just shooting for fun," he added carelessly.

"Can Selby shoot?" asked Burton, trying to draw the conversation around again to the subject of Selby's Indian schooling.

Ben lifted himself on his elbow, and looked up into Burton's face, with a grin of malicious amusement. "Not very well," he said, and opened his mouth in a silent laugh that struck Burton as somehow horrible. Was it possible that he connected the shot through Burton's window, which had been talked of merely as an accident, with Selby?

"What makes you laugh?" asked Burton abruptly.

But Ben would not talk. He turned his head away, with a gesture of weariness that aroused Burton's conscience.

"I mustn't tire you, now; but I'll see you again before I leave. I think I can help you to get a better market for your work. Is there anything you want just now?"

"No. Only to be let alone," said Ben, without looking at him. He spoke so indifferently that it was impossible to charge him with intentional rudeness. The natural man was expressing himself naturally. Burton suppressed an apology as he took his leave.

The door of the surgery was open when he came down the stairs to the back hall, and Doctor Underwood, keen-eyed and eager, with a crutch under his arm, stood in the doorway.

"Well?" he asked. "What have you discovered?"

Burton pushed him gently inside the room, and shut the door. "For one thing, I have discovered that it isn't safe to talk secrets in this house, unless you know where Mrs. Bussey is," he said, with a laugh.

"Yes—she's an inveterate eavesdropper, I know. But we have no secrets to discuss, so I haven't minded. She has the mother instinct to purvey for her helpless young—gossip, or food, or anything else she may think will be acceptable. She wants to keep Ben interested, that's all."

"Perhaps that's all. But she has so much to do with Selby that it makes me uncomfortable for her to hear my casual remarks about him. I couldn't get what I wanted from Ben. He shied off at once when I asked if Selby had learned Indian weaving. I have decided to go up to the reservation to find out."

"Really?" exclaimed the doctor, in obvious surprise. "You attach so much importance to this—idea of yours?"

"It is the only definite and positive clue I have found yet, and I am going

to follow it out. I am satisfied that Selby hates your son. So does the mysterious unknown. The unknown unconsciously ties his knots in a very peculiar manner which he must have learned among the Indians. Selby has had the opportunity to learn from the Indians. There are two steps taken."

"Yes," mused the doctor thoughtfully.

"Is there any one else more likely?" asked Burton. "Have you any enemies? Discharged servants, for instance?"

"No."

"Professional rivals?"

"If there is any poor devil of a doctor so unfortunate as to envy my degree of success—Lord, let him go ahead with his revenge! He needs all the barren consolation he can get."

"Then you really have no suspicion to better my own?"

The doctor shook his head. "I have believed it to be Henry," he said simply.

"Not the hold-up?"

"Even that might have been—though I confess that was the first event that gave me hope, because it gave me a doubt."

"Then I hold to my theory. Did Selby hold himself up, and afterward, with Mrs. Bussey's connivance, get access to your surgery, and hide his chain here under the hearth and his handkerchief behind your books? Does he write those typewritten accusations on your machine while Mrs. Bussey plays sentry? In that case, instead of being a short-sighted proceeding, as I at first thought, it is rather deep. The first intelligent investigation would throw suspicion upon Henry—who, of course, would have access to your room. In short, does Selby supply the venom, and Mrs. Bussey the easy, ignorant, and vindictive tool? That's what is occupying my mind at present."

"Jumping Jerusalem!" gasped Doctor Underwood. "Aren't there some more tenable hypotheses that you have overlooked? Have you given due consideration to the possibility that Ben may be the son of an earl, stolen in childhood, with a strawberry mark on his arm; and Henry my first wife in disguise; and I—— Oh, I can't think of anything that would not be an anti-climax to your imaginative effort. What do you do for mental exercise when you are at home?"

But Burton refused to be diverted. "I am willing to accept any other theory; but I am determined that the mystery shall be named and known. The police don't seem equal to it. I never had any experience in this direction, and I am not overconfident of my own abilities; but I am better than nothing, and I am going to do something—something absurd, or futile, quite possibly—but, at any rate, something."

"If you succeed," said Doctor Underwood quietly, "you will have lifted the curse from my life, and from my heart such a load as I pray you may never have to carry for an hour. If I were a king of the old style, I'd say: 'Ask what you will, even to the half of my kingdom.'"

Burton was about to make some light reply, when the sound of music from the old piano in the drawing-room came in between them. Leslie was playing.

It was to the doctor's offer of half his kingdom what a spark is to a train of powder. The flashing thought it conjured up—though it was less a thought than a dazzling recognition—made him dizzy. He dropped his eyes, dismayingly conscious that it was a thought which he did not care to expose to the keen eyes of the old doctor. He stood silent for a moment, ostensibly listening to the music. Then he lifted his eyes, and put out his hand in farewell.

"Good night, doctor. I shall go up to the reservation to-morrow, and may not be back for a few days; but I'll leave my address at the hotel, in the event of your possibly wanting me. I'll say good night to Miss Underwood as I go out. I assume I'll find her if I follow the music."

"Yes—that's the way it seems, sometimes," said the doctor. The remark was so unintelligible that Burton wondered whether he had dropped his eyes soon enough.

CHAPTER XVII.

A TEMPORARY ABERRATION.

For a moment, as he stood in the doorway, watching her, he had a vision. He saw her in the music room at Oversite, her head outlined against the stained-glass window that he had helped Rachel choose, while Philip—restless, radiant, pervasive Philip—hung over the piano, turning her music, or looking at her with those adoring eyes of his. He shook his head impatiently. The picture vanished, and he went forward to the piano.

Leslie looked up, with a smile; and, though her fingers kept on playing, that appeared to offer no bar to their owner's conversing.

"It was very wise and kind of you to get father to talking about the Indians," she said, looking at him with grateful eyes. "It took his mind from these worrying affairs. He has a lot of enthusiasm for the Indians and the old times in the woods."

"That's the way we get credit we don't deserve, and miss praise that belongs to us," said Burton. "As De Bergerac said, I have done better since. But I drew your father out for purely selfish reasons. I wanted information. I am going up to the reservation myself, to-morrow, to make a few inquiries."

"What if something happens while you are away?" she said, in evident alarm.

"It isn't likely to, while your brother is in jail."

She looked so dismayed and reproachful that he hastened to make his meaning clearer. "Oh, merely because this evil genius of his will be too shrewd to try anything on while your brother is so evidently and publicly out of the reckoning. I think you are quite safe for the immediate present. But, at the same time, I hope you will be very watchful; and, if anything happens that is out of the ordinary, be sure to make a note of it, and let me know when I come back."

"What sort of things?" she asked, with wide eyes.

"If you see any one hanging about the house, or talking to Mrs. Bussey, or——"

"Goodness! She talks to everybody!"

"Go on playing," said Burton softly. As she took up the thread of the melody, with obedient fingers, though with wondering eyes, he sauntered across the room, and then turned suddenly into the hall as he passed the open doorway.

"Oh, Mrs. Bussey! Is that you?" he asked. "Did you want something?"

There was a sound of pattering feet, as the housekeeper hurried nervously away.

"She lacks invention," said Burton, as he came back to the piano. "It would have been so easy for her to pretend that she came to see if you wanted another lamp, or something of that sort."

"She is stupid past belief," said Leslie, in manifest annoyance.

"Does her habit of eavesdropping suggest nothing to you but idle curiosity?" Burton could not refrain from asking.

She looked startled. "No. You don't mean——"

"Oh, I am of an uncharitable nature, and I am ready to see something sinister in anything and everything. I don't want to sow seeds of distrust in your mind, but I'm rather anxious to overlook no possible agency."

"I can't believe it is anything more than vulgar curiosity," said Leslie, after a thoughtful pause. "You know, people of that sort have so little to occupy their minds that they become inordinately curious about the personal doings and sayings of the people among whom they live. I don't suppose a delivery wagon goes by in the street that Mrs. Bussey does not know about it, and speculate as to where it is going, and what it is going to deliver—at whose house. If she were not so curious about everything, I might feel that this was a more serious matter. But—she is so inefficient! I can't imagine her as a mysterious conspirator!"

"Well, let's forget her. Won't you play some more for me?"

"I'd rather talk," she said. "There are some things I want to ask you."

"That pleases me still better."

"I want you to tell me about Philip's mother."

"Very well," he said; but the eagerness had faded out of his voice. "What, in particular?"

"You are a great friend of hers, are you not?"

"Yes—an old friend."

"It was to please her, rather than Philip, that you came here?"

"Yes," he said. He knew that something more than this tame acquiescence was really due from him; but he felt suddenly as barren of invention as ever Mrs. Bussey could have been.

Leslie touched the keys of the piano softly and absent-mindedly as she asked her next question. "What does she look like? Is she beautiful?"

"I have always thought so," said Burton. "She is a little woman, compared with you—tiny, but very imperious and queenly. When she tells me to do a thing, I go and do it, without any objection."

"What would happen if you didn't?"

Burton laughed. "Goodness knows! I never tried it."

"Is she dark?"

"No—very fair."

"Then she probably looks younger than she is. How young does she look?"

"Oh—as though she had been caught in an eddy somewhere between twenty-five and thirty."

"And would stay there. I see. And she dresses exquisitely, doesn't she?"

"That is exactly the word for it."

"Is she contemptuous of those who do not dress exquisitely—or merely tolerant?"

Burton felt rather uncomfortable under these probing questions; but he understood something of the girl's mood, and he could not resent the trace of defiance that he caught under, rather than in, her words. He therefore answered gently:

"I think that, if she likes a person, she likes him whole-heartedly, and without regard to the accidental attributes. She will like you. She will love you."

"What makes you think so?" she asked, with her searching eyes steadily upon him.

"Why—because Philip does, for one thing."

"But if it were not for that—am I the sort of girl that she would be apt to like?"

"What sort of a girl are you?" he asked, with a smile. He knew that her last question held dangerous depths into which he did not care to look at that instant. Rachel was so—well—narrow in her social sympathies!

"Never mind that," said the girl; and he wondered uneasily whether she thought her last question had been sufficiently answered. "Tell me something about their place—Oversite. That is the name of their estate at Putney?"

"Yes; and it is quite as important a place as the town that honors itself by existing alongside the estate. It goes back to the colonial days. The Overmans were Tories during the Revolution, but they managed, somehow, to hold, or to recover, their estate; and, though the family has consented to live under a republic, it has always been conscious of the graciousness of its attitude. Of course, Rachel—Mrs. Overman—is an Overman by marriage only. She comes from a Southern family, herself, and she has the Southern woman's beautiful voice and sweet graciousness. And Philip you know. There is nothing priggish about him."

"Is he fond of the place—Oversite? Would he wish to live there?"

"Oh, unquestionably. It would be difficult to imagine an Overman in any other setting."

"Does Mrs. Overman have the same feeling about it?"

"She is devoted to it. She is more of a royalist than the king."

The broken music that was dropping unconsciously from Leslie's fingers crashed into a sudden stormy volume of sound that made Burton feel as nervous as though a peal of thunder had suddenly shot across the summer night. It filled the room with inharmonious

noise for a few minutes. Then Leslie stopped abruptly, and whirled about on her piano stool.

"You understood clearly, didn't you, that my—my agreement to consider Philip's proposition further was conditioned upon the absolute, complete, and unequivocal clearing of my family's name from the reflections that have been cast upon it? Under no other conditions would I, for a moment, consider the possibility of entering such a family."

"I understood perfectly," said Burton gravely. "Believe me, I shall guard your dignity quite as jealously as you would, yourself."

She dropped her eyes swiftly, but not soon enough to hide the rush of tears that suddenly brimmed them at his words. But she was stanch; and, after a moment, she said gayly, though without lifting her eyelids:

"You asked a while ago what sort of a girl I am. I fancy I am a sort that Mrs. Overman has never met—a girl who has known humiliation, poverty, struggle—and yet who is unreasonably and uncomfortably proud. What have I to commend me to her? My accomplishments are commonplace—perhaps not even passable, in her eyes. And I have nothing else—except a knowledge of life which she would deprecate as something most undesirable—a knowledge that has never come near her. I am just one of the great average!"

She had begun gayly, but she ended bitterly. Burton could not help realizing, as he watched her eyes, misty with deep feeling, and her flushed face, what an exceptional woman she would be in any assembly by the one gift of beauty; and yet he felt that she was one of the few women who would regard a reference to her beauty as a slur rather than as a compliment. So he only answered, as lightly as possible:

"You are—yourself! And that is not an average, by any means. And, as for the knowledge of life that you are inclined to treat so slightingly, any real knowledge is one of the precious things of earth; and what is more to be desired than true understanding of the most important thing the planet holds—life? You surely know, in your heart, that you would not give up what you know for the most graceful ignorance that ever bloomed in some sheltered corner of a drawing-room. When your epitaph comes to be written, would you rather have it read, 'Here lies Leslie, beloved wife, et cetera, et cetera, whose horizon was bounded by the painted windows of her husband's colonial mansion, and who could make the most exquisite curtsy of any in her set,' or, 'She knew the real things of real life. She faced the troubles and the humiliations that come to the men and women who are building up the world of to-morrow out of to-day, and she helped to build courage and loyalty and love and good cheer into the work'?"

Leslie listened with held breath; then suddenly she dropped her folded arms upon the jangled keys, and hid her face upon them. A tremor ran all through her slender body.

Burton bit his lip as he looked at her. He wanted to put out his hand and touch her bowed head—to tell her how wonderful he thought her—to comfort her in some way. The impulse was an amazing one. It set every pulse in his body to tingling. It astonished him so that he walked slowly away toward the window, wondering what had come over him, and how he was going to keep her from guessing that he was liable to attacks of losing his senses.

But in a moment she lifted her head, with a long breath. "Don't think me silly. I—believe I am too tired to be quite myself."

"We are all a little overwrought," said Burton, with great relief. That was probably what the trouble was!

"You have been so much more than kind that there is nothing for me to say about it," she added, arising. "I can't really imagine what I should have done if all this trouble had developed before you came. You have, somehow, made it seem possible to go through with it."

"Of course we will go through with

it!" he answered cheerily. "A year from now you and Philip will be laughing at it." He said the words deliberately, to see how they sounded. They seemed to sound quite simple and natural.

"A year is a long way to guess," she said lightly. "You are going away to-morrow? Then I will say good-by now."

"Let it be good night only," he said, and held out his hand steadily.

She touched it so carelessly with her own that the act seemed to be almost unconscious.

"Good night," she repeated. And then, as he was turning away, she added quickly: "How long has Mrs. Overman been a widow?"

"Nearly a year," he answered.

"Good night," she said again, as though forgetful that she had already said it twice. "I think I am a little tired. But—I'll be all right to-morrow." She lifted her head with that gallant air of hers, and he turned away. It required something of a conscious effort.

He got away quickly, but he did not return at once to his hotel. He wanted to be by himself—though there was nothing that he wanted to say to himself. He simply wanted to walk, under the spreading trees that lined the avenues of the town, and—avoid all thinking. The moonlight shook down through the branches very beautifully. He did not remember that he had ever noticed before how very beautiful that effect was. And yet there was something sad in it. He had not noticed that, before, either. At least, not since he was in college and spent good time, that should have been otherwise occupied, in writing bad poetry to Rachel. Yes—decidedly there was something saddening about the effect of the moonlight.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LETTERS.

That night Burton—still under the influence of the moonlight, though he knew it not—wrote a long letter, as follows:

MY ADORED RACHEL: I am having a very curious experience. I have dropped into a regular melodrama. I suppose there is a plot to it, but so far I have chiefly been kept guessing. You will be interested in it, though I know melodrama is not your favorite style of literature, because it involves nearly the Underwood family. In fact, they are supposed to be the whole head and front of the offending.

I told you that there was some vague accusation of Doctor Underwood in the town—which I felt under obligations, as your ambassador, to investigate, in carrying out the mission with which I was charged. That matter has almost been lost sight of, in the popular excitement over subsequent events. A house burned down the next night, and the police said the fire was of incendiary origin. Thereupon the public jumped to the conclusion that it was set either by Doctor Underwood or his son Henry, though as to the doctor I can personally testify that he was laid up with a sprained ankle that night, and could hardly hobble about his room.

But a trifle like that would cut no figure with an excited public, eager only to hear some new thing that would make its hair stand on end. Then, the following night, a man was assaulted in his own house—tied to his bed, and warned not to talk about people as recklessly as he had been doing. This time suspicion was directed to Henry Underwood, and he has been arrested. The young man refuses bail—on the ground that he wants to be locked up, so as to leave no room for charging him with the next eccentric thing that may happen in High Ridge.

I hope you agree with me that this shows a good deal of spirit and pluck, especially as the town jail is a place that no one who was looking for downy beds of ease would choose for a summer resort.

I must tell you that this young man interests me extremely. There is no vanity in this, for I cannot say that the interest is reciprocated. He treats me with a haughty tolerance that would wound my self-esteem, if I did not see that it is merely his manner to everybody. He seems to go on the theory that all men are in a conspiracy against him, and he will neither ask nor give quarter.

You will gather from this that I do not believe he assaulted the old gentleman in his bed. I don't. Use your judgment as to how much of all this you should tell Philip. And, speaking of that, I am not sure that I fully expressed, in my last letter, my great enthusiasm for Philip's sagacity.

My admiration for the young lady in question has grown with my more extended acquaintance. She is not only beautiful—as I told you in my first report—but she has a lot of personality. That is an attribute which it is hard to designate more specifically, but you know what I mean. She has character, so that you feel you could rely

upon her absolutely in need; and fascination, so that you would never be dull in her company; and simplicity, so that you would never weary of her.

I think it is the artificial element in people that tires us, just as it is the artificial in life. The large, simple things are always restful. The longer we live with them—as shown in the sea and the mountain and the desert—the more we come to depend upon them and love them. Some people are like that—large-natured, and simple, and so true that you never have any disturbing perplexity as to what they may stand for. She is like that, I think. And I feel that Philip has chosen a really wonderful woman for his wife—a woman who will be the making of him.

You may not hear from me again very soon, for I am going out of town on a mission—a secret mission which may be big with importance, if I do not miss my guess. Does that make you curious? In short, I—even I—am going to try my hand at some detective work, on my own account. I shall not tell you the details in advance, because, if I fail utterly, it will be less humiliating to reflect that I have not confessed my wild-goose chasing. But, if your wishes have any influence with the powers that be, do wish me success. I want terribly to pull this thing off. Just think what it will mean to that poor, brave girl! Oh, Rachel, you will be so proud and fond of her! To have helped in any degree to have brought you so rare a daughter, is a matter to cheer the solitary moments of

YOUR BLIGHTED BEING.

MY ADORED RACHEL: This is not a postscript, nor yet is it a mere subterfuge to give me a chance to call you "adored" again. It is another letter under the same cover, because I just happened to think of something else I wanted to say.

Miss Underwood is very proud, very sensitive, and, I suspect, more than a little in awe of the paragon of perfection who will receive this epistle. I think it would be a very "nice" thing, as you would say, for you to write her a little letter—telling her how you will love her, and all that. Who knows better how beautifully you can write when you want to, than your own

BLIGHTED BEING.

Burton mailed the letter without reading it over. It is possible that, if he had applied his mind to the matter, he might have realized that it was not exactly the sort of introduction that would make Miss Underwood *persona grata* to her future mother-in-law; for he had intervals of common sense. But his mind was otherwise engaged. So he sent the letter on its way, with innocent cheerfulness.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RESERVATION.

It was a barren prospect that greeted him when he stepped from the train at the station—the only passenger to alight. A bare, wind-swept prairie; at a little distance, a colony of tepees, with fluttering rags and blankets blowing about, and a bunch of ponies nibbling at the coarse grass, and nothing to mark the hand of the white man, save the rails which ran, in gleaming and significant silence, away into the horizon.

A man, whose clothes were of the indistinguishable color of the sunburnt grass, was sitting on the edge of the platform which made the whole of the station. He was dangling his feet over the edge, and whittling; and it was this occupation, quite as much as his looks, that made Burton guess him to be a white man. He went up to him.

"Can you tell me where to find the agent?" he asked.

The man had been staring at him intently as he approached; and now, after a pause that made Burton begin to wonder whether he had been understood, he cocked his thumb in the direction of a long frame building on the other side of the track. Another white man was standing in the doorway, watching the daily pageant of civilization represented by the passing train; and him Burton approached. Immediately, the man to whom he had spoken slipped from the platform and ran, with a long lope, toward the tepees on the right.

Burton presented himself to the Indian agent, introducing himself as an amateur on the subject of Indian basketry, who wished to add to his knowledge by studying the art among the Indians on the reservation.

The agent, whose name was Welch, evidently found some difficulty in adjusting his own point of view to that of his visitor; but Burton finally succeeded in convincing him that he was at least sane enough to receive the benefit of the doubt, and that there really were people who cared to know about what the Indians made for home use.

"I especially want to see the older squaws, who remember how things were done in the old days, before they were put on reservations," said Burton.

"Old Ehimmeshunka would about fill that bill, I guess," said Welch. "She's old, all right. She's Washitonka's squaw. Their daughter is Pahrunta, and she takes baskets, and fancy things like that, on the railroad train to sell."

"I should like to see them," said Burton eagerly. They certainly were the very people he wanted to see. Those were the names Ben Bussey had mentioned.

"All right—come along."

"Can they speak English?"

"Washitonka speaks fairly well. Ehimmeshunka doesn't need to, of course. Pahrunta knows a few words, enough to enable her to get about by herself. She probably understands a good deal more than she shows. They are that way."

"I shall be greatly obliged if you will act as interpreter."

"Certainly. Hello, here's Washitonka now!"

An old Indian had entered the room so noiselessly that neither of the white men had heard him. He was a striking figure, erect, in spite of the years he carried, and wrapped in a blanket which looked as dignified as any Roman toga. In spite of the stolidness of his expression, there was unmistakable curiosity in the look he bent upon Burton.

"What you want, Washitonka?" asked Welch, in a tone of indulgent jocularity.

The Indian continued to look at Burton, with a frank interest that did not approach rudeness or lessen his dignity. It was hard to say whether his curiosity was friendly or not. He seemed to be a mixture of the child and the sphinx.

"How!" said Burton, with friendly intent.

"How!" responded Washitonka. Then he turned to Welch and made some observations, in a very guttural voice.

"He says he has come to see the man who has a charmed life," said Welch, with a laugh.

"Ask how he knows that I have a charmed life."

After some colloquy, which Burton wished vainly that he could understand, Welch explained: "He says he knew, when he saw the smoke rise this morning, that a man who bore a charmed life would come to his tepee to-day."

"Oh, did he!" exclaimed Burton. "Well, tell him that, when I lit my cigar this morning, I knew by the way the smoke rose that I should meet to-day a wise old man with a silver tongue, who would tell me many wonderful tales of the old days when the Indian and the paleface hunted the buffalo together and were brothers."

Welch laughed, and after a moment's stony impassivity Washitonka relaxed into a grin which betrayed his understanding of the white man's tongue.

"Good talk," he said briefly.

"Will you explain to him that I want to find out about basket weaving?" said Burton.

Welch evidently found it expedient to use Washitonka's own language for elaborate disquisitions of this sort. At the end of his exposition, Washitonka approached a step toward Burton and spoke, with grave dignity.

"'Bacco," was what he said.

Burton had come prepared for this emergency, and he produced a package of tobacco, artfully allowing it to be seen that there were other packages still in reserve.

"Come," said Washitonka, and stalked off in the direction of the sunburnt tepees, toward which the stray lounger at the station had gone.

By this time the little village was very much alive. Curiosity had brought the women and the children to the doors, where they stood shyly staring at the stranger. The men scorned to show open curiosity, but they all seemed to have business out of doors at that moment.

Washitonka's tepee was somewhat larger than the others, but there was nothing else about it to suggest the dignity of the chief. A pile of folded

blankets and garments filled one corner, and cooking utensils were piled in another.

But Burton had neither eyes nor thoughts for the accessories of the place. His attention was wholly given to the little woman, broad of face, brown of skin, who sat by the doorway, stringing beads. Her face was wrinkled like a piece of leather, and her coarse black hair was drawn down behind her ears and tied with gay cord. Her small black eyes followed Burton's motions, as an animal's might. She was so complete and so unusual a picture that Burton would very gladly have made the trip just to see her.

Back of her in the tepee, a woman was moving about her work—the daughter, Pahrunta. Burton smiled at her, and she smiled back, in recognition.

Welch said something in their own tongue, and the younger woman waddled across the place and brought out a large basket, holding the wares that she took to the town to sell. They were mostly trumpery things—impossible birch-bark baskets, and bead-worked match holders and collar boxes, supposed to appeal to the taste of the tourist. But Burton saw, with thankfulness, that the large basket which held the things was woven with the same strong, peculiar twist that he had studied so carefully in the example he already owned.

"Ask them who made the large basket," he said, while he handled the gay trivialities with careless hand.

Welch duly translated the inquiry, and said: "She did—Ehimmeshunka here. Made it long ago, she says."

"Ask her if she will teach me to make one like it."

This, translated, provoked only laughter from Pahrunta, and a grunt from Washitonka. The old, old woman looked on without expression.

"Tell her I will pay her," said Burton, showing money.

It took a good deal of explaining to get the idea really understood, and then Ehimmeshunka shook her head.

"She says the winter has come into her fingers, and they are like twigs when the frost is on them," Welch explained, with some difficulty. "Now she can only put beads on a string, like a child."

"Ask if she ever taught any one when her fingers were young."

Before Welch could translate this question, Washitonka spoke a curt word to the women. His intonation and look needed no translation. Burton guessed quickly enough that it was an injunction of silence, and this was confirmed when Ehimmeshunka's grin faded into stolidity and she took up her work again.

"Old Wash says she never taught anybody," said Welch.

This response, and the look he had intercepted, gave Burton pause. Was he being purposely blocked in his investigation? He did not wish to prejudice his case by too much urgency, so he deemed it best to drop the matter for the time. He gave Ehimmeshunka a coin, and turned away with Welch.

"What do you know, yourself, about these people?" he asked the agent.

"Well, not much. You see, I've just come."

"You know their language."

"Oh, yes. I've been in the service for some time, but I was assigned here only about a month ago, when the other agent died. I haven't seen all the Indians that belong to me, yet. They're away somewhere, hunting, or loafing, or riding their wild ponies over the prairies just for fun. No head for business."

"Then you know nothing of the personal history of Washitonka, or who his friends are?"

"Not a scrap."

"I'm sorry," said Burton. "I wanted to learn something about the early days, when they saw more or less of the early settlers."

"Writing a book?"

"You might call it so," said Burton noncommittally.

"That old chap, Washitonka, ought to have stories to tell," said Welch, with interest. "But he seems as close as a

clam. That's an Indian trait. They won't talk personalities."

"What did he mean by saying I had a charmed life?" asked Burton, returning to a point that had puzzled him.

"Don't know. Said that you cheated death. They have a way of giving names like that. Have you had any narrow escapes?"

"How would Washitonka know it, if I had?"

"Oh, there you get me! Perhaps Pahrunta heard talk of it."

But the suggestion did not satisfy Burton. He had the feeling that Washitonka knew more than he should—unless he had been posted. Yet how could the Indian have been posted? It made him feel that he must go warily.

In the afternoon, he visited other tepees, under Welch's chaperonage, and tried to establish a widespread reputation as a collector of curios and of stories. He did not go near Washitonka's tepee.. He followed the same plan of procedure on the next day—and it took more self-control than he often had occasion to exert. He gained one point by this method, however; he definitely satisfied himself that, if he did not get the information he wanted in Washitonka's tepee, he might as well abandon the idea of getting it anywhere on the reservation. There was no one else—in this little colony, at any rate—who dated back to the time he wanted to probe. When he asked why there were no old people, the agent answered tersely:

"Smallpox."

That curse of the winter had swept the nomadic tribes again and again in their days of wandering, and only the younger and stronger had survived to find the comparative protection of the reservation life. And to this younger generation the past had either no value or too emotional a value. They had forgotten its traditions, or else they refused to tell them to the stranger of to-day. Burton's inquiry was specific and definite—had any white men been among them and learned how to weave baskets? To them, it was a foolish question—so foolish that they could with difficulty be persuaded to make a definite answer. Why should any white man wish to weave baskets? Could he not buy better baskets in the stores, not to mention buckets of beautiful tin? Nobody made baskets but old Ehimmeshunka.

On the third day he returned, with as casual an air as was possible, to Washitonka's tepee. Ehimmeshunka was sitting in the sunshine by the door. Washitonka was smoking some of Burton's tobacco, with an air of obliviousness; but when Burton placed himself beside Ehimmeshunka and began talking in a low voice to his interpreter, Welch, the old Indian promptly laid aside his dignity, and came over to the little group by the door. Clearly, he was not going to allow any conversation in his tepee without his knowledge.

There was little opportunity, however, for any asides, since Burton was under the necessity of talking through an interpreter. It was so cumbersome a method that he resolved to abandon his small attempt at diplomacy, and to strike boldly for what he wanted.

"Ask Washitonka if he knows Doctor Underwood. I am a friend of his," Burton said to Welch. He watched the faces of the Indians as this was translated, but he could see no glimmer of responsiveness in any countenance. Possibly it was merely because he did not understand the language of their unfamiliar faces, any more than he understood their unfamiliar tongue.

"Tell them I know Selby," he continued, while he watched Pahrunta.

At the sound of the name, she looked toward him with blank directness, and Burton rejoiced. He had established communication! But when Welch repeated the remark in the Indian tongue, it brought no response from any one. Washitonka merely grunted. Pahrunta turned away and spat upon the ground, but that might have had no significance.

"They don't seem to know him, either," said Welch.

"Ask the woman what she calls the man who struck her arm in the station,

when she spoke to him, and spilled her baskets."

But Pahrunta would not answer. She listened as though she heard nothing, and turned away as though they had not spoken.

"Is it possible that she is still friendly to Selby?" wondered Burton. "Is she so much the savage that she admires him the more for having struck her?"

Welch yawned, as though the game were losing its interest. "The train is about due," he said, arising. "I guess I'd better go and meet it, in case there is any mail."

He wandered off, leaving Burton to his own resources. Washitonka, apparently satisfied that he was not dangerous without an interpreter, lapsed back into dignified unconcern and tobacco smoke.

Burton was, indeed, helpless. Should he confess himself beaten, and take the afternoon train back to High Ridge? He was still debating the question when Welch returned—the train from the south having come in while he was tossing his mental penny.

"A letter for you!" Welch called, while still at a distance, as though the arrival of a letter were a great event.

It was from Ralston, and Burton read it with interest.

> Everything is so quiet along this Potomac that Watson is getting more pessimistic about Henry Underwood than ever. He has long felt that to lock Henry up would be the quickest means of giving High Ridge a long-needed rest, and now he feels confirmed in his faith—or in his unfaith, if you take that point of view. I have been tempted to stir up a little local ruction myself, just to give your side some moral support; but I am not sure that it would be moral support, under those circumstances. How is that?

"I'd better go back," mused Burton, as he folded the letter. "I'm accomplishing nothing here, and I'm wasting time." To Welch he said, aloud: "Tell them I am going back to High Ridge this afternoon."

Welch made the announcement. After an undemonstrative silence of some moments, Washitonka put a question which Welch translated.

"He asks if you will see the man who lies on his back all the time."

"Ben Bussey?"

Washitonka caught the name, and nodded.

"Yes, I shall see Ben Bussey," said Burton. "What, then?"

Washitonka went to a side of the tepee and, from a pile of folded blankets, drew out a red stone pipe, beautifully carved. With an air of dignity that would have done credit to a Spanish grandee, he carried it to Burton, and placed it in his hands, with a guttural injunction which Welch translated.

"He wants you to give it to the cripple. He says he taught the boy to carve pipes many moons ago, and Ben's father ate of his corn and slept under his buffalo robe like a brother."

"Thank him for the pipe," dictated Burton. "Tell him I will carry it safely to Ben Bussey, the man who cannot walk, and it will speak to him of old friends. Ask him if he knows when Ben's father died."

But instantly the mask of reserve dropped over the bronze features that, for a moment, had looked human.

"He doesn't remember," said Welch.

There was no use in waiting for a lapse into memory, when ignorance was so persistently fostered.

Burton arose. "Ask Washitonka to accept from me this tobacco. It is in farewell. And for the women in his tepee I have brought presents." He took from his pocket two small hand mirrors, and presented one to Ehimmeshunka, and one to Pahrunta. Old Ehimmeshunka received hers with the delight of a child. She looked in it and laughed, wrinkling up her queer old face in a manner wonderful to see. Pahrunta received hers in silence. Indeed, she hid it at once in her dress, with an eagerness which showed that its ownership was prized, but that she did not share the excitability of her mother. Instead, she looked steadily at Burton. While he was making his final and formal adieus to Washitonka, he several times caught Pahrunta's serious eyes fixed upon him. But when

he left the tepee, she was busy over her work, and gave no heed to him.

The train went out at four. Half an hour before it was due, Burton carried his bag over to the station platform. Then, merely from the habit of motion, he began pacing up and down the length of the boardwalk, waiting for the train. He was not in a cheerful mood; for his expedition had been a failure.

As he turned on his heel at the extreme end of the walk, a blinding flash of light struck his eyes and made him wince. Where in the world did it come from? As he looked about, it flashed again, dazzlingly, into his eyes.

A recollection of the way in which, as a youngster, he had indulged in the pleasing diversion of bewildering the passers in the street with a properly manipulated bit of looking-glass, helped him now to form a theory as to the present phenomenon. Some urchin was having fun with the paleface!

He looked carefully about; but there was no one in sight, nor was there, seemingly, any place on the bare prairie where a mischievous child might hide —unless it was behind that leaning fence, which served the railroad for a snow-break in winter, but which was now overgrown with the rank weeds of the summer. As he turned a suspicious eye upon it, he caught a momentary flash, instantly hidden.

With a smile on his lips, he sauntered down to the place, expecting to pull out from among the weeds some lithe, wriggling, brown-skinned boy; but, to his utter amazement, he found, crouching among the tall weeds, the heavy-featured Pahrunta, in her hand the mirror he had given her an hour before, and which she had used to attract his attention. Her attitude and actions showed plainly that she was anxious not to be seen from the tepees, and, with a quick understanding of her desire for concealment, Burton walked on a few steps, lit a cigar, and then slowly sauntered back as far as the fence, and stopped near the place where she crouched.

"Did you want to tell me something?" he asked, speaking distinctly, and hoping that she might be more of a linguist than had yet appeared.

Such seemed, indeed, to be the case.

"You—friend," she said, in a throaty guttural, helping her halting speech by pointing her finger at him.

"I am your friend—yes," said Burton.

But she shook her head. "You—friend—man——"

In a rapid pantomime, she struck her own arm, shrank from the blow, and threw before her a handful of leaves, which she followed with her eye as they blew away. It was so vivid a sketch of the scene at the station at High Ridge, when Selby struck down her outstretched hand and sent her baskets flying down the steps before her, that Burton was thrilled by the skill of it. She wished to know if he was a friend of Selby's!

For a moment, he hesitated as to the policy of his answer; then, hoping that the truth might prevail, he shook his head.

"No. Enemy. I follow on his trail. Some day scalp him." He felt that it was the proper place for pantomime on his part, but feared his ability. But she seemed to catch his meaning, and, to his great relief, she smiled in satisfaction.

"Washitonka friend," she said, pointing to the tepee. "Me no friend." She spat upon the ground. "Washitonka hide. Me show." And from the folds of her garment she suddenly brought out a small black object.

It was an old-fashioned daguerrotype case. She opened it, and held it toward Burton, but when he would have taken it into his own hand she drew back.

"See—no take," she said. Evidently she would not trust it out of her own possession.

He bent down to look. The case held, on one side, one of those curious early portraits which can only be seen when the light is right, but which then come out with the startling distinctness of ghost pictures. He turned her hand, which clutched the case tightly, until he caught the picture.

Two young men—or, rather, a boy and a young man—looked out from behind the glass, with the odd effect of an older fashion in hair and dress. The older of the two had the close-set eyes and narrow face that characterized Selby. It was Selby as he might have been twenty-odd years ago—a young man under twenty. The other might, he thought, be Ben Bussey. Of that he could not be sure, but he felt eagerly sure of Selby. He put his finger on the face, and looked at Pahrunta.

"Selby?" he said. "The man that struck you?"

She shut the case, hid it hastily in her dress, and drew back among her concealing weeds. With the skill and noiselessness of an animal, she slunk in among them so that Burton himself was hardly able to locate her with his eye. There was no use in following her. If he had learned nothing else, he had learned that it is not possible to get from an Indian any information except what he wishes to give.

At that moment, the whistle announced the approach of the train. Pahrunta had timed her confession so that he could not press her farther if he wanted to. He walked back to the platform, picked up his bag, and swung himself on. As they puffed past the weed-grown snow-break, a moment later, he looked out; but no sign could he catch of the skulking figure which he knew to be hidden there. But, on a chance, he tossed a gleaming coin back toward it.

He found a quiet seat, and gave himself up to analyzing the situation. Just what had he gained? A few disconnected facts. He pieced them together.

1.—Old Ehimmeshunka did use in her basket work the peculiar knot he had identified in the woven lilac withes and in the cord that bound Hadley.

2.—Washitonka was either naturally very secretive, or he had been warned not to talk. The latter theory was strengthened by the fact that he had seemed to know something about the two attacks on Burton, and by Pahrunta's fear of discovery.

3.—Pahrunta had broken the imposed silence, under the spur of resentment toward Selby, and revealed the fact that there was the link of an ancient friendship between Selby and the redman. The presentation of the portrait as a souvenir could mean nothing else.

4.—Washitonka had most carefully refrained from mentioning Selby, although he had avowed his friendship for Bussey, Ben's father.

5.—Yet Doctor Underwood had spoken of Bussey and young Selby as companions in the wild, early days. They had hunted together, and together had roamed among the Indians. As civilization caught up with them, Selby had dropped the ways of the Indian; while Bussey, more of a bohemian by nature, had gone with them when they went. But in the beginning they had all been intimate, and the fact that Ben—if it were Ben, as seemed likely—had been taken in the same picture with Selby, showed that the intimacy had extended over a number of years. Doctor Underwood, too, had formed acquaintances among the Indians, but his day, apparently, was later.

Had old Ehimmeshunka, who wove baskets like no one else in the tribe, taught her skill to young Selby, when he went about among them in the garb of that old portrait, trading calicoes "warranted to fade in the first wash," as the doctor said, for their mink and muskrat skins? That was the prime question, and he could hardly claim that it was certainly answered. The opportunity had existed—that much he *had* learned. Had it been used?

"By Jove!" said Burton, suddenly struck by an idea. He leaned forward, seeing nothing, for a long time. Then he repeated, in an awestruck way: "By Jove!" The idea had struck him hard.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TELEGRAM.

When Burton reached High Ridge, it was already late in the evening. If he had followed his inclinations, he would have gone like a shot to Rowan Street; but something that he called

common sense interfered. He lost no time, however, in hunting up Watson, the chief of police. The chief was at home, and was thinking of going to bed, when Burton called. He didn't think of it again for quite a while.

"I feel like I was rehearsing for private theatricals," he said, with a somewhat embarrassed laugh, after Burton had gone over his plans with him in minute detail.

"That's all right. If we get what we want, it will be worth it. If we don't, we won't be any worse off than we are now. You understand. You will see that Underwood is taken home —not before eleven o'clock—and that your plain-clothes man stays with him from that minute until further orders. And no one must know that he is out of jail, except the man with him. I'll see the family in the morning, and explain; and I'll see Selby in the course of the morning, and see that he knows the news. Then, just an hour after he is in the house—neither more nor less—there is to be an alarm of fire. You will see about that. Then I'll see you afterward, and we'll decide whether to go on with it."

"I guess I've got it straight," said Watson. "You are responsible for this, you know; and if anything goes wrong, you——"

"I'll take the responsibility, all right. It will be a busy day, but I rather hope something may come of it, Mr. Watson."

Watson cleared his throat discreetly. Of course, if anything *did* come of it, he wouldn't mind taking the credit for the result; but, since he was already committed to a theory on the subject of the High Ridge mystery, he didn't care to welcome any other suggestion too enthusiastically.

Burton went to his hotel, his thoughts in an excited whirl of possibilities. There was a telegram waiting for him. He tore it open, and read it twice over before he could focus his mind sufficiently to understand it.

Arrive two to-morrow private car. Be ready go on West with me.

RACHEL OVERMAN.

"To-morrow!" ejaculated Burton, trying to pull his thoughts together. "What in the world is the matter? Go West? Well, hardly! Is Phil worse, I wonder. Thank Heaven, she doesn't arrive in the morning. But go West to-morrow! Why, what nonsense!"

He did not stop to consider that it was exactly the sort of nonsense that he had given Rachel reason to expect of him for the last twenty years.

CHAPTER XXI.

GROUND BAIT.

Burton made an early call the next day at the Red House on Rowan Street. Leslie Underwood was in the garden when he came up, and he stopped for a moment at the gate to enjoy the picture she made.

It would be impossible for any one with artistic sensibilities not to enjoy a painted picture of a beautiful girl bending before a bed of pansies, her summer gown of blue lawn making an effective contrast to the green grass upon which its folds rippled, and her hair bare to the sun. It would, therefore, have argued merely brutish insensibility on Burton's part if he had not felt the charm of the real thing. Perhaps, moreover, it would not have been necessary for him to feel it so keenly that it seemed like a hand laid hushingly upon his heart. He stood, staring, in a forgetfulness of himself that would have been a valued tribute to any work of art.

Some instinct warned the girl; she turned her head abruptly, and, when she saw him, she arose and came toward him, strewing the gathered pansies like many-colored jewels along the sod.

"Oh, you're back!" she exclaimed.

It was so indisputable a statement of fact that he did not attempt an answer. But perhaps she did not notice the omission, for as she withdrew her hand from his she asked gayly:

"Well, what luck?"

"I'll tell you—to-morrow."

"Then you *have* found something?"

"This is the time, Miss Underwood, when I can properly assume the air of inscrutable mystery which belongs by all tradition to the astute detective. If I had really been up in my part, I should have assumed it long ago, instead of revealing my actual ignorance so recklessly. It's rather late in the day to begin to be mysterious, I admit; but I am disposed to claim the privilege for the next twenty-four hours."

She watched him eagerly. "Something is brewing!"

"Hum—possibly. But please observe that I don't say there is."

"I shall watch you."

"I am flattered by your notice. I begin to perceive that I have been even more improvident than I guessed, in letting the opportunity to be mysteriously interesting slip until now."

She laughed, and stooped to gather her forgotten pansies.

"I believe it's good news! I know you are hopeful, because you are gay."

"Perhaps I am gay merely to hide a perturbed heart."

She looked up quickly, questioningly.

"Have you heard from Philip lately—or his mother?" she asked. The question may have been suggested by his words, or it may not.

"I received a telegram from Mrs. Overman last night. She says she is to be here to-morrow, on her way West."

"Here? Oh!" The girl looked startled. "Must I see her?"

"Would you rather not?"

"Oh, I could not bear to see her—yet."

"Then you need not," said Burton promptly, reckless of Rachel's feelings on the subject. "She is only going through the town, and very likely may not leave her car."

"You are not going on with her?" she asked, with sudden alarm.

"Oh, no, indeed!"

Then, as an afterthought, she asked: "Is Philip with her?"

"She didn't say. She doesn't tell me more than she thinks is good for me to know. But I have a bit of news for you. Henry is coming home this morning."

"Oh! How is that?"

"He is under guard, of course. But, even so, it will be a pleasant change for him. But it is not to be spoken of outside the house."

She looked puzzled. "That's all I am to know?"

"At present."

"Very well," she said, with a sweet meekness that made him laugh, but with a curious catch at his heart. It is dangerous for a woman to play at meekness.

She recovered herself quickly, and struck gayly into another theme. "Guess who's engaged!"

They had been walking up the path to the house, but at this he stopped short. "Engaged? Here? Some one I know?"

"Yes!"

"Not your brother?"

"Henry? Why, no. What made you think of him? It's Mr. Selby!"

"And Miss Hadley?" he asked, in dismay.

"Yes. How clever of you! How did you guess?"

"Wait a minute. Don't go in, just yet," said Burton, stopping at the door. He led her aside to a garden bench, which stood against the wall. "I want to consider this. Tell me all you know about it."

"There is nothing more to tell. Mr. Selby hasn't called for our congratulations. But the report is abroad."

"Does your brother know it?"

"I don't know." She looked up, with obvious surprise. "Why? Why do you speak of him?"

"Did it never occur to you that Henry and Selby hated each other so bitterly because they both cared for Miss Hadley?"

"Henry? Oh, impossible!"

"Not impossible at all, I assure you."

"Why, he hardly knows her."

"How long is it necessary to know a person before falling in love?"

"I have no statistics on the subject."

"Well—my word for it, it doesn't

take very long sometimes. And, my word for it, again, Henry was in love with Miss Hadley. I wish we might keep him from hearing this news for a while."

"Why, you don't think Henry will shoot Selby at sight for carrying off his girl, do you?" she laughed.

"You are a heartless girl to laugh about it. Having some one else carry off the girl you love is a much more serious matter than you seem to realize. But I am not worrying about Selby. To be sure, it would look pretty bad for Henry if Selby were assassinated the first day he was out of jail; but Mr. Selby is under the special protection of the powers of mischief who are running things here, and I have no anxiety on his behalf."

"Mrs. Bussey says that the milkman says that the Hadleys' housemaid says that Minnie was up in her room, crying, all day yesterday," said Leslie mischievously.

"For goodness sake, don't let Henry hear that!" exclaimed Burton. But the remark reminded him of Mrs. Bussey's specialty, and he glanced rather anxiously at the open drawing-room windows, under which they had been sitting. Was it his fancy, or did the curtain stir with something more palpable than the wind? What a situation for this girl to live in! It was intolerable.

He was looking at her so intently that she looked up as though he had spoken.

"What is it?" she asked swiftly. "You are hiding something from me!"

"I am trying to," he said, recovering himself. "I think my only chance of succeeding is in keeping away from you. Where is your father?"

"In the surgery, I think."

"I'm going in to speak to him." He left her, a little abruptly, and went to the front door, where Mrs. Bussey admitted him, her old air of curiosity struggling with timid resentment. Burton returned her look with keen interest. *Had* she been listening at the window?

"How do you do, Mrs. Bussey? And how's Ben? I'm coming up to see him, in a minute. I have a little present from an old Indian who used to know him."

Mrs. Bussey relaxed into a smile, and hurried away, while Burton went on to the surgery to find the doctor.

"I don't dare say that my soul is my own, in this house, without first making sure that Mrs. Bussey won't overhear me, and betray the damaging secret to my dearest enemy," he said, as he shook hands. "She is always at hand when I am indiscreet. I wanted to tell you privately, and with the utmost secrecy, that Henry is coming home this morning—very soon. It is a part of a little scheme I am working out. He is really to be kept under the strictest surveillance. I wanted to explain this, so that you would understand the presence of the stranger who will accompany him, more or less inconspicuously, and not make any remarks in regard to him—say, in the hearing of Mrs. Bussey."

"You are very mysterious."

"I am engaged in the services of a very mysterious family. The point is simply that Henry is to seem free, and yet is really to be under close guard, and that nobody is to say anything about anything, but simply to lie low and wait. You understand?"

"I don't understand a thing."

"That will do just as well, provided you are content to remain in that state."

"Does Henry understand that he is to be watched?"

"Of course." Burton glanced at his watch, and arose.

But the doctor detained him. "What about the basket? Did anything come of that?" he asked eagerly.

"I found the old squaw who made it."

"Well?"

"Well!"

"What of it?"

Burton shook his head. "I don't know—yet."

"You still think——"

"I have postponed thinking till tomorrow. Now, I must go up and see

Ben for a minute—I told Mrs. Bussey I was coming up. I found that his father is not forgotten up there."

"You must come back and tell me all about it," insisted the doctor. "Stay for luncheon, and entertain me. Do!"

Burton shook his head, standing impatiently with his hand on the door-knob. "Thanks, but I can't. I have a full afternoon before me. I am hatching a conspiracy of my own."

"And you won't take me into your confidence?"

"No. You look out for Henry. He's due to arrive any minute." He let himself out, glanced at his watch, and ran up the broad back stairs to Ben's room.

Mrs. Bussey opened the door to admit him, with an air of embarrassment which he did not understand until he entered and found that Selby, also, was in the room. While Burton was surprised, he was glad that it had so fallen out. It would save him the necessity of thinking up some excuse for an interview later.

"How are you, Bussey? Good day, Mr. Selby," he said, taking a chair, without waiting for further invitation. The men returned his greeting rather ungraciously, and Burton guessed at once that he had interrupted something in the nature of a discussion which had left them at cross purposes. Selby's face was twitching with nervous anger, and Ben looked as morose as a badgered animal.

"I have just been up to the reservation for a few days, trying to find some Indian baskets," Burton went on, feeling his way conversationally into the murky atmosphere. "You see, your collection inspired me, Mr. Selby. And I learn that important things have been happening in High Ridge while I was away." He smiled significantly at Selby.

The latter scowled in embarrassment, and then escaped from personalities by his customary way of anger. "At any rate, there haven't been any houses set afire lately."

"No, nor any hold-ups in the streets, nor any shots fired through people's windows," Burton countered lightly. "All seems to have been beautifully quiet. But I hear that Henry goes free to-day."

"Goes free?" repeated Selby nervously.

"So I hear. Probably they came to the conclusion that they didn't have sufficient reason for holding him."

Selby jumped from his chair, and fidgeted across the room. Ben watched him, with the hint of a malicious smile chasing the shadows from his face. It was Mrs. Bussey who spoke.

"Then, like as not, some one will be held up, or some house will be set afire, to-night."

"Oh, I hope not," said Burton, with a good show of concern. "That would make it look pretty black for Henry. But I hear that Watson didn't want to let him out, just on that account. Henry and Watson are not very good friends, it seems."

"Watson knows the tricks that Henry was up to, six years ago," said Mrs. Bussey.

"Well, I may be able to get Henry out of town by to-morrow," said Burton. "If he isn't in High Ridge, nobody can blame him if Watson's house burns, after that. I guess it's safe to risk it for one night."

Ben had turned his head away indifferently. He still seemed to be brooding over something, and heedless of Burton's talk.

But Selby turned abruptly from the window where he had been standing, and flared out at Burton: "You seem to be meddling a good deal in matters that don't concern you! Did you tell Ben that I didn't pay him enough for his work?"

So that was what they had been quarreling about!

"I told him I thought I could get better prices for it," answered Burton. "I think I can. Don't you consider it probable?"

"What business is it of yours?"

"None. I am simply meddling, as you correctly say."

"Then meddle, and be damned to

you! As for Ben's carving, I'll never take another stick of it. You can look out for him, after this." And he flung out of the room.

Mrs. Bussey began to whimper. "Now, what'll we do? Selby was mean, but he did pay something. And there ain't anybody else that Ben can work for."

"Yes, there is," said Burton promptly. "I'll see that he has a chance to sell anything he does."

Mrs. Bussey sniffed, but perhaps she did not mean to sniff cynically. However, Burton felt that the tide of sympathy was setting against him, and he hastened to talk of more cheerful matters.

"I met an old friend of yours on the reservation—Washitonka, his name is. Remember him?"

"Yes," said Ben impassively.

"He sent you this red stone pipe."

Ben took the pipe in his fingers, and turned it over and over, with careless curiosity. "I can carve better than that," he said calmly, and laid it down.

"Yes, you carve very well. You have strong and skillful fingers. But I think Washitonka sent you the pipe in token of friendship, rather than to show his skill. He says he taught you to carve pipes, long ago. Is that so?"

"Maybe so. I have forgotten."

"He hasn't forgotten you. And I saw Ehimmeshunka, who made the big basket I bought of Pahrunta. She is old." Burton glanced again at his watch, and, as he replaced it in his pocket, took out a little wooden box. "Here is something else I brought you. It's a box of red pigment. Did you ever try to color your carvings? I have seen Indian carvings that were colored, and I thought you might like to experiment with something of that sort. It would make your work look more Indian. This is a powder, you see; but it dissolves readily in water, and it makes a fast color. It's some kind of earth, I suppose——"

"Fire! Fire!"

The cry came so sharply and shrilly across the quiet that Burton started, spilling the powder. Hastily, he snapped the cover on the box, and sprang to the door.

A puff of smoke, acrid and yellow, rushed into the room from the hall.

"Your kitchen is afire, Mrs. Bussey!" he exclaimed, and ran down the stairs. Mrs. Bussey followed, in a clattering hurry.

The kitchen door, opening into the back hall at the foot of the stairs, was wide open, and the smoke was rushing out in great volumes. Burton dashed heroically into the midst of things, and then in a minute he laughed reassuringly.

"No great harm. It's only your dish towels, Mrs. Bussey."

The noise and the smoke had penetrated to the rest of the house; and almost at the same moment, Leslie, Henry, and a stranger came rushing to the spot, followed by Mrs. Underwood and the doctor.

Even in that moment of general confusion, Mrs. Underwood was calm enough to still the turmoil of the elements. Burton could not but admire her perfectly consistent poise. Turning her still eyes upon Mrs. Bussey, who was exclaiming hysterically over the pile of smouldering towels, she dropped her cool words like snowflakes on the fire.

"What matter about a few towels, Mrs. Bussey? There are more important things in the world."

"Important, indeed! It's important enough that we might all have been burned in our beds!"

"Not at midday, Mrs. Bussey," interposed the doctor. "We do many things in this house that we ought not to do, and we leave undone many things that we ought to do, but we haven't yet achieved the distinction of staying in bed till twelve of the clock."

"How would we have got Ben down from that second floor, where he lies like a log, if the house had gone?" cried Mrs. Bussey, with a sudden access of fury, as the thought struck her. Then she saw Henry Underwood leaning against the doorpost, a sardonic smile on his white face. "You villain, that's what you were trying to do!"

she screamed. "You were going to burn the house down, to catch Ben!"

"If your dish towels weren't so dirty, they wouldn't catch fire all by themselves," he said insolently.

"All by themselves!" the indignant woman exclaimed. "They were set fire to, and that any one can see. It's incenerary, that's what it is, and——"

"Come—scatter," said Leslie quickly. "Mrs. Bussey and I want to clean up this kitchen. You can discuss the philosophy of events elsewhere."

Henry laughed, and turned on his heel. The strange man, who had stood just behind him and had said nothing through it all, went out with him.

"I wish you'd come into the surgery, Burton," said the doctor. He had been staring steadily at the smouldering pile of towels, still smoking whitely on the floor, where Burton had flung them. One might almost have guessed that he wished to avoid the eyes of the little group in the room.

"In a moment. I'll just run up and reassure Ben." And, suiting the action to the word, he ran up the stairs, two steps at a time, and put his head in at the half-open door.

"A false alarm, Bussey," he said. "No danger. Just a lot of smoke from some towels in the kitchen. Were you frightened?"

"No," said Ben stolidly.

"Here's your box of pigment, that I carried off. I'll leave it on your table," said Burton, crossing the room. His voice shook in his throat when he spoke. He came back and stood by the couch for a moment, looking down curiously at Ben's impassive face.

"Suppose it had been a real fire, Ben! Wouldn't you have been frightened, then? What would you have done?"

Ben's face twitched for a moment with a passing emotion. "I guess that would have been Henry Underwood's affair," he said indifferently, and turned his face away.

"Henry is downstairs now."

But Ben made no answer to this, and Burton left him. He ran down the stairs and looked into the surgery, the door of which was standing open.

"Come inside," said the doctor, pulling him in and shutting the door behind him. "What am I to think of this?"

"Of what?"

"You know perfectly well. You are as white as—as I would be if I showed what I felt. Where was Henry when that fire started?"

"I don't know."

"He came into the house not ten minutes ago——"

"Watson is a man of his word."

"And went up to his room. Do you believe in evil spirits, that carry out the secret wishes of men who are—criminally insane?"

"I should hate to say I didn't, because the idea offers so interesting a field for speculation that it strikes me it would be amusing to entertain it. But what suggests the question?"

The doctor looked at him with miserable eyes. "Who started that fire?" he asked, almost inaudibly.

Burton answered in the same undertone: "I did. But don't mention it. I'm afraid my reputation might suffer."

The doctor stared at him with such obvious dismay that Burton laughed aloud.

"By deputy, of course! I'm not crazy, doctor, but I confess I am somewhat excited. I can't stop to explain further, because I have an engagement."

"Engagement be hanged! You are inventing that. Explain what you mean."

"If I hadn't an engagement, I should invent one, to get away from you. I don't want to talk to you. And I shall have a continuous engagement for the rest of the day. Good day to you."

"Pooh-pooh to you," responded the doctor derisively. But the miserable look had been taken from his face.

The conclusion of this story will be published two weeks later, in the first February issue; on sale January 10th.

The Lemon County Hunt

By Edgar Beecher Bronson

Author of "Reminiscences of a Ranchman," Etc.

There is something in a flying horse that sets your pulses throbbing. Have you ever speculated about the thoughts of a horse as his rider "lifts" him over the fences in a hunting country? Mr. Bronson puts a wise old Irish hunter in the rôle of story-teller; and when you have read the yarn, you'll be ready to swear that a good horse has not only a heart and a soul, but a keen sense of humor.

ONE crisp winter morning, a party of us left New York to spend the week-end at the Lemon County Hunt Club.

It was there I first met Sol, the dean of Lemon County hunters, and for eight seasons the winner, against all comers, of the famous annual Lemon County Steeplechase.

At the hurdles, whether in the great public set events, or in private contests, Sol was never beaten, while in the drag hunts it was seldom, indeed, he was not close up on the hounds from "throw-in" to "worry."

To the Club Mews, he had come under the tragic name of Avenger, but such was the marvelous equine wisdom he displayed, that, at the finish of his third hunt in Lemon County, he was rechristened Solomon by his new owner—soon shortened to Sol for tighter fit among sulphurous hunt expletives.

At that night's dinner, Sol and his deeds were the chief topic of conversation, and also its principal toast.

And why not, when no hunting stable in the world holds a horse in all respects his equal?

Why not toast a horse, now twenty-six years old, who has missed no run of the Lemon County hounds for the last eight years, never for a single hunting day off his feed or legs?

Why not toast a horse who takes ordinary timber in his stride, and eats up the stiffest stone walls for eight full hunting seasons without a single fall?

Why not toast a horse with the prescience and generalship of a Napoleon, a horse who drives straight at all obstacles in a fair field, but who never imperils his rider's head beneath overhanging boughs; who foresees and evades the "blind ditches" and other perils lurking behind hedges and walls; and who lands as steady and safe on ice as he takes off out of muck?

Why not toast this venerable, but still indomitable, King of Hunters?

The next morning it was my privilege to meet him. In midwinter, he, of course, was not "in condition." Descriptions of his weird physique, and jests over his grotesquely large and ill-shaped head, made by half a dozen voluble huntsmen over postprandial bottles, I thought had prepared me against surprise. Certainly they had described such a horse as I had never seen.

But, come to the door of his box, I was astounded to see, slouching lazily in a corner, with eyes closed, the nigh hip dropped low, a horse that at first glance appeared Don Quixote's Rosenante reincarnate, a gigantic "crow-bait," with a head as long and coarse

as that of an eighteen-hand mule, an under lip pendulous as a camel's, drooping ears nearly long enough to brush flies off his nostrils, with such an ingrowing concavity of under jaw and convexity of face as would have enabled his head to accurately supply the third of a nine-foot circle, a face curved as a scimiter, and nearly as sharp.

Both in shape and dimensions it was the grossest possible caricature of a roman-nosed equine head the maddest fancy could conceive.

Slapped lightly on the quarter, a transformation took place.

Eyes out of which shone wisdom preternatural in a horse, opened and looked down upon us, with the calm, questioning reproach one might expect from a rude awakening of the Sphinx; then the tall ears straightened, and the great bulk rose to the full majesty of its seventeen hands; and, while "slats," hip bones, and shoulder blades were distressingly prominent, a glance got the full story of Sol's wonderful deeds and matchless record for safe, sure work.

With massive, low-sloping shoulders, tremendous quarters, exceptionally short of cannon bone, and long from hock to stifle as a greyhound, with a breadth of chest and a depth of barrel beneath the withers that spelled most unusual lung capacity, behind the throatlatch Sol showed, in extraordinary perfection, all the best points of a thoroughbred hunter that make for speed, jumping ability, and endurance.

And as he so stood, a flea-bitten, speckled white in color, he looked like a section out of the main snowy range of the Rocky Mountains, the two wide-set ears representing the Spanish Peaks, his sloping neck their northern declivity, his high withers, sharply outlined vertabræ, and towering quarters the serrated range crest, his banged tail a glacier reaching down toward its moraine!

Sol needed exercise, and, that afternoon, I was permitted the privilege of riding him.

Mounted from a chair, and settled in the saddle, it felt as if I must surely be bestriding St. Patrick's Cathedral. But at a shake of the reins, the parallel ceased. His pasterns were supple as an Arab four-year-old's, his muscles steel springs.

Myself quite as gray as Sol and, relatively, of about the same age, as lives of men and horses go, we early fell into a mutual sympathy that soon ripened into a fast friendship.

Christmas, I returned to the club to spend holiday week, in fact sought the invitation, to be with Sol. Every day we went out together, Sol and I, morning and afternoon.

Bright, warm, open winter days, so soon as the spin he loved was finished, I slid off him, slipped the bit from his mouth—and left him free to nibble the juicy green grasses of some woodland glades—and, between nibble times, to spin me yarns of his experiences.

For the subtle sympathy that subsisted between us, sprung of our trust in each other, and sublimated in the heat of our mutual affection, had sharpened our perceptions until intellectual intercommunication became possible to us.

I know Sol understood all I told him, and I don't think I misunderstood much he told me.

So here is his tale, as nearly as I can recall it:

"Ye know I'm Irish, and proud of it. It's there they knew best how to make and condition an able hunter.

"No pamperin', softenin' idleness in box stalls or fat pastures, or light road joggin', goes in Ireland between huntin' seasons.

"It's muscle and wind we need at our trade in Ireland, and neither can be more than half diviloped in the few weeks' light conditionin' work that all English and most American cross-country riders give their hunters.

"Steady gruellin' work is what it takes to toughen sinews and expand lungs, and it's the Irish huntsman that knows it.

"So between seasons we drag the plows and pull the wains, toil at the rudest farm tasks, and thus are kept

in condition on a day's notice to make the run or take the jump of our lives.

"Humiliatin'? Hardly, when we find it gives us strength and stayin' power to lead the best the shires can send against us; they've neither muscle nor stomach to take Irish stone and timber.

" 'It's a royal line of blood, his,' I've often heard Sir Patrick say; 'a clean strain of the best for a hundred years, by records of me own family. His head? Not a freak in the line till him, and where the divil, and by what misbegotten luck he came by it is the mystery of Roscommon. And it's by that same token we call him Avinger, for no sneerin' stranger ever hunted with him that didn't get the divil's own peltin' with clods off his handy Irish heels.'

"And the head groom had it from the butler, and passed it on to me that the old Master of the Roscommon Hounds was ever swearin' over his third bottle, of hunt nights, when I was no more than a five-year-old, and the youngsters would be fleerin' at Sir Pat over the shape of me head:

" 'Faith, an' it's Avinger's head ye don't like, lads, is it? By the powers o' the Holy Virgin, but it's me pity ye have that none of ye can show the likes in your stables. By the gray mare that broke King Charlie's neck, it's the head of him holds brains enough to distinguish ten average hunters, brains no ordinary brainpan could hold; an' it's a brain-box the shape of a shot sack makin' the disfigurin' hump below his eyes. It's a four-legged gineral is Avinger, with the cunnin' foresight of a Bonaparte and the cool judgment of a Wellington.'

"Ah! but they were happy days on the old sod, buckin' timber, flyin' over brooks, stretchin' over stone, or lightin' light as bird atop of walls too broad to carry, and springin' on, with a good, light-handed man up that knew his work and left ye free to do yours.

"And a sad night it was for me when Sir Pat, stripped by years of gambling of all he owned but the clothes he stood in and me, staked and lost me to a hunt visitor from Quebec.

"I was a youngster then, only a nine-year-old, but I'll niver forget the two weeks' run from Queenstown to Quebec, whereon huntin' tables were reversed and I became the rider and the ship me mount, across country the roughest hunter ever lived through; niver a moment of easy, flat goin', but an endless series of gigantic leaps that nigh jolted me teeth loose, churned me insides till they wouldn't even hold dry feed, and gave me more of a taste than I liked of what I had been givin' Roscommon huntsmen over lane side-wall jumps—a rise and a jolt, rise and a jolt, till it was wonderin' I was the ears were not shaken from me head.

"Humiliation? It was there at Quebec I got it. In old Roscommon usually it was lords and ladies rode me of hunt days, men and women bred to the game as I meself was.

"But at Quebec, the best—and I had the best—were beefy members of their dinkey colonial government, or fussy, timid barristers I had to carry on me mouth.

"Seldom it was I carried a good pair of hands and a cool head in me nine years' runnin' with the Quebec and Montreal hounds. And, lucky the same was for me, for it forced me to take the bit in me teeth, rely on meself, and regard me rider no more than if he were a sack of flour. I jist had it to do to save me own legs and me rider's neck, for to run by their reinin' and pullin' would have brought us a cropper at about two out of every three obstacles.

"Faith, and I believe it's an honest leaper's luck I've always had with me, anyway, for me Quebec work was jist what I needed to train me for an honorable finish with the Lemon County Yankees.

"One autumn, eight years ago, when I was eighteen, a clever young Yankee visitor from New York appeared at our club. For two days, I watched his work on other mounts, and liked it. He was good as any two-legged product of the old sod itself, a handsome youngster, a bit heavier than Sir Pat,

a reckless, deep-drinkin', hard-swearin', straight-ridin' sort, but with a head and hands ye knew in a minute ye could trust, be name, Jack Lounsend. The third hunt after his arrival, it was me delight to carry him—and for the first time in years to allow me rider his will of me. And you can bet your stud and gear I gave him the best I had, for the sheer love of him, and him so near the likes of me dear Sir Pat.

"Nor was me work to go unvalued, for, to me great delight, he bought and brought me to the States—straight away to Lemon County—along with two of me huntmates he fancied.

"And a sweet country I found this same Lemon County, with timber and stone nigh as stiff, and sod as sound, as old Roscommon's own.

"But troubles lay ahead of me I'd not foreseen. Instead of goin' into Jack's private string, as I'd hoped, the early record I made for close finishes and safe, sure work made me wanted by the chief patron of the hunt, a New York multirailroadaire, with a well-diviloped habit of gettin' everything he goes after. So, while I venture to believe Jack hated to part with me, the patron got me.

"And a good man up the patron himself proved, one I'd always be proud enough to carry; but, as Jack used to say, the hell of it was, the Lemon County Hunt numbered more bunglin' duffers than straight riders, the sort a youngster or a hot-head would be sure to kill.

"So when, as often happened, the patron was busy with faster runs and a hotter 'worry' than our hunt afforded, it frequently fell me lot to carry the half-broke of all ages, seldom a one bridle-wise to our game, as sure to pull me at the take-off of a leap as to give me me head on a run through heavy mud, the sort no horse could carry and finish dacently with, except by takin' the bit in his teeth and himself makin' the runnin'. And, even so, it was a tough task, fightin' their rotten, heavy hands and loose seat!

"But, by the glory of old Roscommon, never once have I been down in me eight years with the Lemons!

"Once, to be sure—on me first run, by the way—I slashed into one of your brutal wire fences, the first I'd ever seen—looked a filmy thing you could smash right through—caught a shoe in it, and nigh wrenched a shoulder blade in two. Sure, I never lost me feet, but it laid me up a few days, and you can gamble any odds you like no wire has ever caught me since; and, more, that I now hold record as the only horse in the county that takes wire as readily as timber, where it's necessary—though sure it is, I'll dodge for timber every time where I won't lose too much in place.

"Down they'd come to Lemon County, a lot of those New York beauties, men and women, togged out so properly you'd think they'd spent their whole lives in the huntin' field; but at the first obstacle you'd see their faces go white as their stocks, and then all over you they'd ride from tail to ears, their arms sawin' at your mouth fit to rip your under jaw off, like they thought it was a backin' contest they were entered for.

"And sure back to the rear it soon was for them, back till the hounds were mere glintin' specks flyin' across a distant hill crest, the riders' red coats noddin' poppies, back till only faint echoes reached them of the swellin', quaverin' chorus of the madly racin' pack, back for all but him or her whom old Sol had his will of, for rider never lived could hold me to the wrong jump or throw me from my stride, or fence built I'd not find a place to leap without layin' a toe on it.

"Once the hounds give voice, it's the divil himself couldn't hold me, whether it's the short, sharp war cries of the Irish or the sweet, deep bell notes of these Yankee hounds that to me ever seem chantin' a mournful dirge for the quarry.

"Sure it's the faster Irish hounds that make the grandest runnin', but it's the deep-throated, mellow chorus of a Yankee pack I love best to hear.

"*Nouveaux riches,* whatever kind of

bounders that spells, is what Bob Berry calls the lot of mouth sawers New York sends us; and whenever the patron is out or Jack has his way, it's niver one of them I'm disgraced with.

"Sometimes it's me good old Jack up; sometimes hard-swearin', straight-goin' Bob; sometimes little Raven, as true a pair of hands and light and tight a seat as hunter ever had; sometimes Lory Ling, as reckless as the old Roscommon sire of him I used to carry when I was a five-year-old, with a ring in his swears, a stab in his heels, and a cut in his crop that can lift a dead-beat one over as tall gates as the best and freshest can take; sometimes it's Priest, that, with the language of him and the helltasplit pace he'll hold a tired one to, but ill desarves the holy name he wears; and *sometimes*—my happiest times, it's a daughter of the patron up, with hands like velvet and the nerve and seat of a veteran.

"Horse or human, it's blood that tells every time, me word for that. Be they old or young, you can niver mistake it. Can't stop anything with good blood in it—gallops straight, takes timber in its stride, and finishes smartly every time. Know it may not, but it balks at nothin', sets its teeth, and drives ahead till it learns.

"And perhaps this wasn't driven well home on me last fall!

"Out to us came a little woman, a scant ninety-pounder, I should say, so frail she wouldn't look safe in a drag, and a good bit away on the offside of middle age, but the mouth of her had a set that showed she'd never run off the bit in her life, and her eye—my eye! but she had an eye, did that woman.

"And it was hell-bent to hunt she was, bound to follow the hounds, though all she knew of a saddle came of five-mile-an-hour jogs along town park bridle paths, and all her hands looked fit for was holdin' a spaniel.

"Well, it was Lory and Priest took her on, turn about, usually me that carried her; and it was break her slender little neck I thought the divils would, in spite of me. Took her at everything, and spared her nowhere, bowled her along across meadow and furrow, over water, timber, and walls, like she was a lusty five-year-old, and all the time a-guyin' her, in a way to take the heart out of anything but a thoroughbred.

"'Don't mind the fence,' Lory would sing out: 'if you get a fall, just throw your legs in the air and keep kickin', to show you're not dead; we never want to stop for any but the dead on this hunt.'

"And, smash, on my quarters would come her crop, and on we'd go!

"Again, when we'd be nearin' a fence across which two were scramblin' up from croppers, Lory would brace her with:

"'Don't git scared at that smoke across the fence; it's nothin' but the boys that couldn't get over burnin' up their chance of salvation!'

"And into me slats her little heel would sock the steel, and high over the timber I'd lift her for sheer joy of the nerve of her!

"But it was not always me that had her. One day I saw a cold blood give her a fall you'd think would smash the tiny little thing into bran, landed so low on a ditch bank he couldn't gather, and up over his head she flew, and on, till I thought she was for takin' the next wall by her lonesome. And when, finally, she hit the ground it was to so near bury herself among soft furrows that it looked for a second as if she'd taken earth, like any other old wily fox, tired of the runnin'.

"But tired? She? Not on your bran mash! Up she springs like a yearlin', and asks Lory is her hat on straight—which it was, straight up and down over her nigh ear.

"'Oh, damn your hat,' answers Lory; 'give us your foot for a mount, if you're not rattled. Why, next year you'll be showin' your friends holes in the ground on this hunt course you've dug with your own head!'

"And up it was for her and away again on old 'cold blood.'

"Faith, but those 'cold bloods' make it a shame they're ever called hunters.

Fall the best must, one day or another, but while the thoroughbred goes down fightin', strugglin' for his feet, and generally either winnin' out or givin' his rider time to fall free, if down he must go, the 'cold blood' falls loose and flabby as an empty sack, and he and his rider hit the ground like the divil had kicked them off Durham Terrace.

"Ah, but it was the guts of a true thoroughbred had Mrs. Bruner; and whether up on cold or hot blood, along she'd drive at anything those two hare-brained dare-devils would point her at.

"Nor is all our fun of hunt days. Between times, the lads are always larkin' and puttin' up games on each other out of the stock of divilment that won't keep till the next run, each never quite so happy as when he can git the best of a mate on a trade or a wager.

"One day little Raven and I galloped over to Lory's place.

" 'Whativer mischief are you and his wisdom up to?' sings out Lory to Raven, the minute we stopped at his porch.

" 'Nary a mischief,' answers Raven; 'want some help of you.'

" 'Give it a name,' says Lory.

" 'Easy,' says Raven; 'the master's got a new fad—crazy to mount the hunt on white horses. I've old Sol here, and Jack has a pair of handy white ones for the two whips, but where to get a white mount for Jack stumps us. Jogged over to see if you could help us out.'

"Lory was lollin' in an easy-chair, lookin' out west across his spring lot. Directly I saw a twinkle in his eye, and, followin' the line of his glance, there, slouchin' in a fence corner, I saw Lory's old white work mare, Molly. Sometimes Molly pulled the buggy and the little Lings, but usually it was a plow or mower for hers. I'd heard Lory say she was eighteen years old, and that once she was gray, but now she's white as a first snowfall.

" 'How would old gray Molly do, Raven?' presently asks Lory.

" 'Do? Has she ever hunted?' asks Raven.

" 'Divil a hunt of anything but a chance for a rest,' says Lory; 'never had a saddle on, as far as I know, but she has the quarters and low, sloping shoulders of a born jumper, and it's you must admit it. Let's have a look at her.'

"So out across the spring lot the three of us went, to the corner where Molly was dozin'.

"And, true for Lory, it was the old lady had fine points, and, lightly slapped with Raven's crop, showed spirit and a good bit of action.

" 'She's sure got a good strain in her,' says Raven; 'where did you get her, Lory?'

" 'Had her twelve years,' says Lory; 'brought her on from my Wyoming ranch; she and a skullful of experience and a heartful of disappointment made up about all two bad winters left of my ranch investments. The freight on her made her look more like a backset than an asset, but she was a link of the old life I couldn't leave.'

" 'Well, give her a try-out,' laughs Raven, 'and if she'll run a bit, and jump, we may have some fun passin' her up to Jack.'

"So Lory takes her to the stable, has her saddled, and mounts, and I hope never to have another rub-down if she didn't gallop off like she'd never done anything else, stiff in the pasterns, and hittin' the ground fit to bust herself wide open, but poundin' along a fair pace.

"Then we went into a narrow lane, and I gave her a lead over some low bars, and here came game old Molly stretchin' over after me, like fences and her were old stable mates.

" 'Well, I *will* be damned,' says Raven; 'she's a hoary wonder. Give her a week of handlin', and trim her up, and it'll be Jack for mother at a stiff price; he's so bent on his fad, he'll take a chance on her age.'

"And then it was clinkin' glasses and roarin' laughter in the house with them, while I began tippin' Molly a few useful points at the game as soon as the groom left us in adjoinin' stalls.

"Four days later, Lory brought Molly over to the hunt club mews, and if I'd

not been on to their mischievous plot, I'll be fired if I'd known her. It was a cunnin' one, was Lory, and he'd banged her tail, hogged her mane, clipped her pasterns, polished her hoofs, groomed, fed up, and conditioned her, and—I do believe—polished her yellow old fangs, till she looked as fit a filly as you'd want to see.

"And soon after, when Molly was unsaddled and stalled, into an empty box alongside of me slips Lory with Tom, the best whip and seat of our hunt; and says Lory:

" 'You never seem to mind riskin' your neck, Tom.'

" 'Thank ye kindly, sir,' says Tom; 'h'all in the day's work.'

" 'Well, if you'll give the old gray mare a week's practice at wall and timber, gettin' out early when none but the sun and the pair of you are yet up, I'll give you the little rifle you lovin'ly handled at my place the other day. But mind, it's your neck she may break at the first wall, for I've niver taken her over anything much higher than a pigsty.'

" 'Right-o, sir,' says Tom. 'If there's any jump in the old girl, I'll get it out of 'er.'

"The next Saturday afternoon, the biggest meet of the season, up rides that divil of a Lory on Molly, him in a brand-new suit of ridin' togs, and her heavy-curbed and martingaled like she was a wild four-year-old, the pair lookin' so fine I scarce knew the man or Raven the mare.

" 'Hi, there, Lory!' says Raven. 'Wherever did you get the corkin' white un?'

" 'S-s-sh, you blame fool,' says Lory.

" 'The divil you say!' whispers Raven, reins aside, chucklin' low to the two of us, and with a knee press I knew meant, 'Sol, jist you watch 'em!'

"And we were no more than turned about when up rides the master, Jack, both ears pointin' Molly, and says:

" 'Good looker you have there, Lory. New purchase?'

" 'No, indeed,' says Lory; 'old hunter I've had some years; brought her on from the West; just up off grass and not quite prime yet; guess she'll finish, though.'

"Think of it—the nerve of the divil—and him knowin' she was more likely to finish at the first fence than ever to reach the 'check'!

"For the day's course was a full ten-mile run, and a 'check' was laid halfway for a blow or a change of mounts.

"Presently the hounds opened at the 'throw-in,' an Irish pack it takes near a steeplechase pace to stay with, and we were off on as stiff a course as even Lemon County can show.

"And a holy miracle was Lory's ridin' that day. For nigh four miles he held tight behind two duffers who, while up on top-notchers, pulled their mounts so heavily that they took a top rail off nearly every fence they rose to, and swerved for low wall-gaps, till he'd got Molly's nerve up a bit.

"Then, takin' a chance on the last mile, Lory raced straight ahead, liftin' her over wall and timber to try the best, until close up on Jack.

"Just then Jack turned and watched them as they were approachin' a heavy four-foot jump—a broad stone wall and ditch. Sure I thought it was all up with Lory, but at it he hurled her, and I'll be curbed if she didn't take it as cleverly as I could.

"Old Molly finished third at the 'check'—but at the expense of a pair of badly-torn knees, got scrapin' over stone and wood, which that rascal of a Lory hid by swervin' to a white clay bank and plasterin' her wounds with the clay, and then she was led away by his groom.

"Joggin' back from the 'worry' that evenin', Jack lay tight in Lory's flank till Lory had consented, apparently with great reluctance, to sell him Molly for five hundred dollars.

"The very next week, Jack, Raven, and the two whips turned out on white hunters—Jack, of course, up on Molly, and happy over the successful workin' out of his fad.

"But good old Jack's happiness was short-lived, for after the 'throw-in' he

was not seen again of the hunt that day; the first fence Molly had negotiated in fine style, but at the second she came a terrible cropper that badly jolted Jack and knocked every last ounce of heart out of her, cowed her so completely that she'd be in that same meadow yet if there'd not been a pair of bars to lead her through, and divil a man was ever found could make her try another jump.

"Great was the quiet fun of Lory and Raven, though Lory's lasted little longer than Jack's joy of his white mount. Of course, Jack was too game to let on he knew he'd been done, but not too busy to sharpen a rowel for Lory.

"And the rankest wonder it was Lory niver saw it till Jack had him raked from flank to shoulder—just stood and took it without a blink, like a donkey takes a lash.

"Within a week of Molly's downfall Lory was out on me one day, when up rides Jack and says:

" 'There's a splendid hunter in me stable I want ye to have, Lory. Got more than I can keep, and your stable must be a bit shy since you parted with the white mare. He's the bay seventeen-hander in the Irish lot. Stands me over a thousand, but you can have him at your own price; don't want the hardest, straightest rider of the hunt shy of fit meat and bone to carry him.

"Belikes it was the blarney caught him, but anyway Lory buried his muzzle in Jack's pail till he could see nothin', but what Jack said it held, and took the bay at six hundred dollars, just on a casual look over.

"It was good action, a grand jumpin' form, and rare pace the bay showed on a short try-out that afternoon, so much so I overheard Lory tellin' himself, when he was after dismountin' just outside me box: " 'Gad! But ain't old Jack easy money!'

"But when Lory and the bay showed up at the next day's meet, I noticed the bay's ears layin' back, or workin' in a way to tell any but a blind one it was dirty mischief he was plannin'.

"Nor was he long playin' it. For about a third of the run the bay raced like a steeplechaser tight on the heels of the hounds, leadin' even the master, for Lory could no more hold him than his own glee at the grand way they were takin' gates and walls.

"But suddenly that bay divil's spawn swerves from the course, dashes up and stops bang broadside against a barn—and there, with ears laid back tight to his head and muzzle half upturned, the bay held Lory's off leg jammed so tight against the barn that, rowel and crop-cut hard as he might, the only thing Lory was able to free was a flow of language it was a holy providence didn't fire the barn and burn up the pair of them.

"And as Jack passed them I heard the divil sing out:

" 'Ha, ha, Lory! 'Twas the gray mare wanted to jump, but couldn't, and it's the bay can jump, but won't! It's an Oh, hell! for you and a Ha! ha! for me this time!'

"Which, while they're still fast friends, was the last word ever passed between them on the subject of the funker and the balker."

OVERLOOKED

LITTLE Willie had been told that he must always wait patiently till he was served at table, and not cry across the table or grab for his food.

One day, while dining at a neighbor's with his mother, the little fellow was accidentally overlooked.

He was very patient for a time, but at last he could bear the strain no longer of seeing everybody feeding but himself. So, leaning quietly across to his mother, he said, in a loud whisper:

"Mother, do little boys who starve to death go to heaven?"

A Tamer of Wild Ones

By B. M. Bower

Author of the "Flying U" stories, "Curlew Corliss," Etc.

II.—THE OPTIMISM OF ANDY GREEN

"I DON'T see," said Cal Emmett crossly, "what's the use uh this whole outfit trailing up to that contest. If I was Chip, I'd call the deal off, and start gathering calves. It ain't as if we had a man to ride for that belt and purse. Ain't your leg well enough to tackle it, Pink?"

"No," Pink answered shortly, "it ain't."

"Riding the rough bunch they've rounded up for that contest ain't going to be any picnic," Weary defended his chum. "Cadwolloper would need two good legs to go up against that deal."

"I wish Irish was here," Pink gloomed. "I'd be willing to back him, all right. But it's too late now; he couldn't enter if he was here."

A voice behind them spoke challengingly. "I don't believe it would be etiquette for one outfit to enter two peelers. One's enough, ain't it?"

The Happy Family turned coldly upon the speaker. It was Slim who answered for them all. "I dunno as this outfit has got any peeler in that contest. By golly, it don't look like it since las' night!"

Weary was gentle, as always, but he was firm. "We kinda thought you'd want to withdraw," he added.

Andy Green, tamer of wild ones, turned, and eyed Weary curiously. One might guess, from telltale eyes and mouth, that his calmness did not go very deep. "I don't recollect mentioning that I was busy pennin' any letter uh withdrawal," he said. "I got my sights raised to that purse and that belt. I don't recollect saying anything about lowering 'em."

"Aw, gwan. I guess *I'll* try for that purse, too! I betche I got as good a show as——"

"Sure. Help yourself; it don't cost nothin'. I don't doubt but what you'd make a real pretty ride, Happy." Andy's tone was deceitfully hearty, and did not suggest in the least that he would like to choke Happy Jack, though that was his secret longing.

"Aw, gwan. I betche I could make as purty a ride as we've saw—lately." Happy Jack did not quite like to make the thing too personal, for fear of what might happen after.

"Yuh mean last night, don't yuh?" purred Andy.

"Well, by golly, I wish' you'd tell us what yuh done it for!" Slim cut in disgustedly. "It was nacherlay supposed you could ride; we got *money* up on yuh. And, then, by golly, to go and make a fluke like that before them Diamond G men; to go and let that blue roan pile yuh up b'fore he'd got rightly started t' pitch—— If yuh'd stayed with him till he got t' swappin' ends there, it wouldn't uh looked quite so bad. But t' go and git throwed down right in the start—by golly!" Slim faced Andy accusingly. "B'fore them Diamond G men—and I've got money up, by golly!"

"Yuh ain't lost any money yet, have yuh?" Andy inquired patiently.

What Andy felt like doing was to "wade into the bunch"; reason, however, told him that he ought to take

his medicine quietly. He had permitted an avowed bad horse to throw him, almost on the eve of riding for the championship, and he could not well explain just how it had happened. He could not wonder that the faith of the Happy Family was shattered, and that they mourned as lost the money they had already rashly wagered on the outcome of the contest. The very completeness of their faith in him, their very loyalty, seemed to them their undoing. To them the case was plain enough. If Andy could not ride the blue roan in their own corral, how was he to ride that same blue roan in Great Falls? Or, if he could ride him, no sane man would dare to hope that he could win the purse and the belt under the stringent rules of the contest, where "riding on the spurs," "pulling leather," and a dozen other things were barred? So Andy, under the sting of their innuendoes and blunt reproaches, was so patient as to seem to them cowed.

"No, I ain't lost any yet, but, by golly, I can see it fixin' to fly," Slim retorted heavily.

Andy looked around at the others, and smiled as sarcastically as was possible, considering the mood he was in. "It sure does amuse me," he observed, "to see growed men cryin' before they're hurt. By gosh, I expect t' make a stake out uh that fall. I can get long odds from them Diamond G's, and from anybody they get a chance to talk to. I'm kinda planning," he lied boldly, "to winter in an orange grove and listen to the birds singing, after I'm through with the deal."

"I reckon yuh can count on hearing the birds sing, all right," Pink snapped back. "It'll be tra-la-la for yours, if last night's a fair sample uh what yuh expect to do with the blue roan." Pink walked abruptly away, looking very like a sulky cherub.

"I s'pose yuh aim to give us the impression that you're going to ride, just the same," said Cal Emmett.

"I sure am," came the brief reply. Andy was beginning to lose his temper. He had expected that the Happy Family would "throw it into him," to a certain extent, and he had schooled himself to take their drubbing. What he had not expected was their unfriendly attitude, that went beyond mere disappointment, and made his offense—if it could be called that—more serious than the occasion would seem to warrant. Perhaps Jack Bates unwittingly made plain the situation when he remarked:

"I hate to turn down one of our bunch; we've kinda got in the habit uh hanging together and backing each other's play. But, darn it, we ain't millionaires, none of us—and gambling, it is a sin. I've got enough up already to keep me broke for six months if I lose, and the rest of us is in about the same fix. I ain't raising no long howl, Andy, but you can see yourself where we're kinda bashful about sinking any more on yuh than what we have. Maybe you can ride; I've heard yuh can, and I've seen yuh make some fair rides myself. But yuh sure fell down hard last night, and my faith in yuh got a jolt that fair broke its back. If yuh done it deliberate, for reasons we don't know, for Heaven's sake say so, and we'll take your word for it, and forget your rep for lying. On the dead, Andy, did yuh fall off deliberate?"

Andy bit his lip. His conscience had a theory of its own about truth-telling, and permitted him to make strange assertions at times. Still, there were limitations. The Happy Family was waiting for his answer, and he knew instinctively that they would believe him now. For a moment, temptation held him. Then he squared his shoulders, and spoke truly.

"On the dead, I hit the ground unexpected and inadvertent. I——"

"If that's the case, then the farther yuh keep away from that contest the better—if yuh ask *me*." Jack turned on his heel, and followed Pink.

Andy stared after him moodily, then glanced at the rest. With one accord, they avoided meeting his gaze. "Damn a bunch uh quitters!" he flared hotly, and left them, to hunt up the Old Man

and Chip—one or both, it did not matter to him.

Pink it was who observed the Old Man writing a check for Andy. He took it that Andy had called for his time, and when Andy rolled his bed and stowed it away in the bunkhouse, saddled a horse and rode up the grade toward town, the whole outfit decided for a certainty that Andy had quit.

Before many hours had passed they, too, saddled and rode away, with the wagons and the cavvy following after—and they were headed for Great Falls and the fair there to be held; or, more particularly, the rough-riding contest, to which they had looked forward eagerly and with much enthusiasm, and which they were now approaching gloomily and in deep humiliation, because Andy, their chosen contestant, had failed to ride in their own corral the horse culled from the Flying U outfit to test the skill of all comers in the contest. Truly, it would be hard to find a situation more galling to the pride of the Happy Family.

But Andy Green had not called for his time, and he had no intention of quitting; for Andy was also suffering from that uncomfortable malady which we call hurt pride, and for it he knew but one remedy—a remedy which he was impatient to apply. Because of the unfriendly attitude of the Happy Family, Andy refused to ride with them to the fair. Instead, he had drawn what money was still placed to his credit on the pay roll, had taken a horse and his riding outfit, and gone away to Dry Lake, where he intended to take the train for Great Falls.

In Dry Lake, however, he found that the story of his downfall had preceded him, thanks to the exultant men of the Diamond G. And the tale had not shrunk in the telling. Dry Lake jeered him as openly as it dared, and part of it—that part which had believed in him—was quite as unfriendly as was the Happy Family. To a man, they took it for granted that he would withdraw from the contest, and they were not careful to conceal what they thought. Andy found himself rather left alone, and he experienced more than once the unpleasant sensation of having conversation suddenly lag when he came near, and seeing groups of men dissolve at his approach. Andy, before he had been in town an hour, was in a mood to do violence.

For that reason, he kept his plans rigidly to himself. When some one asked him if he had quit the outfit, he returned gruffly that the Flying U was not the only cow outfit in the country—and let the questioner interpret it as he liked. When the train that had its nose pointed to the southwest slid into town, Andy did not step on, as had been his intention. He stayed idly leaning over the bar in Rusty Brown's place, and gave no heed. Later, when the eastbound came screeching through, at midnight, it found Andy Green on the platform, with his saddle, bridle, chaps, quirt, and spurs neatly sacked, and a ticket for Havre in his pocket. So the wise ones said that they knew Andy would never have the nerve to show up at the fair, after the fluke he had made at the Flying U ranch. It was considered a very good joke—by those whose pockets were not interested.

At Havre, Andy bought another ticket, and checked the sack which held his riding outfit, and the ticket had Great Falls printed on it, in bold, black lettering. So that Andy was twelve hours late in reaching his original destination, and to avoid unwelcome discovery and comment, he took the sleeper, and immediately ordered his berth made up, so that he passed through Dry Lake behind the sheltering folds of the berth curtains. Not that there was need of this elaborate subterfuge. He was simply mad clear through, and did not want to see or hear the voice of any man he knew.

That is why he sought out the most obscure rooming house that gave any promise of decency and comfort, and stayed off Central Avenue and away from its loitering groups of range dwellers who might know him. That is why he hired a horse, and rode, early and alone, to the fair grounds on the open-

ing day, and avoided, by a roundabout trail, a certain splotch of gray-white against the brown of the prairie, which he knew instinctively was the camp of the Flying U. They had made good time, and were located, to their liking, near the river. Andy felt a tightening of the chest when he saw the familiar tents, and kicked his hired horse illnaturedly in the ribs. It was all so different from what he had thought it would be.

In those last two weeks, he had pictured himself riding vaingloriously through town on his best horse, with a new Navajo saddle blanket, making a dab of bright color, and a new Stetson, dimpled picturesquely as to crown, and tilted rakishly over one eye, and his silver-mounted spurs catching the light; around him would ride the Happy Family, also in gala attire, and mounted upon the best horses in their several strings. The horses would not approve of the street cars, and would circle and back—and it was quite possible, even probable, that there would be some pitching and some pretty riding before the gaping populace, which did not often get a chance to view the real thing. People would stop and gaze, while they went clattering by. And he, Andy Green, would be pointed out by the knowing ones as a fellow that was going to ride in the contest, and that stood a good chance of winning.

But this was different. He was in Great Falls, and he had not ridden vaingloriously down Central Avenue, surrounded by the Happy Family, and watched by the gaping populace. Instead, he had chosen a side street, and he had ridden alone, and no one seemed to know or care who he might be. His horse had not backed, wild-eyed, before an approaching car, and he had not done any pretty riding. Instead, his horse had scarce turned an eye toward the jangling bell when he crossed the track perilously close to the car, and he had gone "sidewheeling" decorously down a nearly deserted street—and Andy hated a pacing horse. The Happy Family was in town, but he did not know where. Andy kicked his horse into a gallop, and swore bitterly that he did not care. He did not suppose that they gave him a thought, other than those impelled by their jeopardized pockets. And that, he assured himself pessimistically, is friendship!

He tied the hired horse to the fence which bounded the fair grounds, and went away to the stables, where he fraternized with a humpbacked jockey, who knew a few things himself about riding, and was inclined to talk unprofessionally. It was not at all as Andy had pictured the opening day, but he got through the time somehow until the crowd gathered, and the racing began. Then he showed himself in the crowd of "peelers" and their friends, as unconcernedly as he might, and as unobtrusively.

The Happy Family, he observed, was not there, though he met Chip face to face, and had a short talk with him. Chip was the only one, aside from the Old Man, who really understood. Billy Roberts, of the Diamond G, was there, and he greeted Andy commiseratingly, as one speaks to a sick man, or one in mourning; the tone made Andy grind his teeth, though he knew in his heart that Billy Roberts wished him well—up to the point of losing the contest to him, which was beyond human nature. Billy Roberts was a rider, and knew—or thought he knew—just how "sore" Andy must be feeling. Also, in the kindness of his heart, he tried blunderingly to hide his knowledge.

"Going up against the rough ones?" he queried, with careful carelessness, in the hope of concealing that he had heard the tale of Andy's disgrace.

"I sure am," Andy returned laconically, with no attempt to conceal anything.

Billy Roberts opened his eyes wide, and his mouth a little, before he recovered from his surprise. "Well, good luck to yuh," he managed to say, "only so yuh don't beat me to it. I was kinda hoping yuh was too bashful to get out and ride before all the ladies."

Andy, remembering his days in the

sawdust ring, smiled queerly; but his heart warmed to Billy Roberts amazingly.

They were leaning elbows on the fence below the grand stand, watching desultorily the endless preparatory manœuvres of three men astride the hind legs of three pacers in sulkies. "This sidewheeling business gives me a pain," Billy remarked, as the pacers ambled by for the fourth or fifth time. "I like *caballos* that don't take all day to wind 'em up before they go. I been looking over our bunch. They's horses in that corral that are sure going to do things to us twenty peelers."

"By gosh, yes!" Andy was beginning to feel himself again. "That blue hoss—uh course, yuh heard how he got me, and heard it with trimmings—yuh may think he's a man-eater; but, whilst he's a bad hoss, all right, he ain't the one that'll get yuh. Yuh want t' watch out, Billy, for that HS sorrel. He's plumb wicked. He's got a habit uh throwing himself backward. They're keeping it quiet, maybe—but I've saw him do it three times in one summer."

"All right. I didn't know that. But the blue roan——"

"The blue roan'll pitch and bawl and swap ends on yuh, and raise hell all around, but he can be rode. That festive bunch up in the reserve seats'll think it's awful, and that the HS sorrel is a lady's hoss alongside him, but a real rider can wear him out. But that sorrel—when yuh think yuh got him beat, Billy, is when yuh want to watch out."

Billy turned his face away from a rolling dust cloud that came down the home stretch with the pacers, and looked curiously at Andy. Twice he started to speak, and did not finish. Then: "A man can be a sure enough rider, and get careless and let a horse get him when he ain't looking, just because he knows he can ride that horse," he said, with a certain diffidence.

"By gosh, yes!" Andy assented emphatically. And that was the nearest they came to discussing a delicate matter that was in the minds of both.

Andy was growing more at ease, and feeling more optimistic every minute. Three men still believed in him, which was much. Also, the crowd could not flurry him, as it did some of the others who were not accustomed to so great an audience; rather, it acted as a tonic, and brought back the poise, the easy self-confidence which had belonged to one André de Gréno, champion bareback rider. So that, when the rough-riding began, Andy's nerves were placidly asleep.

At the corral in the infield, where the horses and men were foregathered, Andy met Slim and Happy Jack; but, beyond his curt "Hello," and an amazed "Well, by golly!" from Slim, no words passed. Across the corral, he glimpsed some of the others—Pink and Weary, and, farther along, Cal Emmett and Jack Bates; but they made no sign, if they saw him, and he did not go near them. He did not know when his turn would come to ride, and he had a horse to saddle at the command of the powers that were. Coleman, the man who had collected the horses, almost ran over him. He said, "Hello, Green," and passed on, for his haste was great.

Horse after horse was saddled, and led, perforce, out into the open of the infield; man after man mounted, with more or less trouble, and rode to triumph or defeat. Billy Roberts was given a white-eyed little bay, and did some great riding. The shouts and applause from the grand stand rolled out to them in a great wave of sound. Billy mastered the brute and rode him back to the corral, white-faced, and with beads of sweat standing thick on his forehead.

"It ain't going to be such damn' easy money—that five hundred," he confided pantingly to Andy, who stood near. "The fellow that gets it will sure have to earn it."

Andy nodded, and moved out where he could get a better view. Then Coleman came, and informed him hurriedly that he came next, and Andy went back to his place. The horse he was to ride he had never seen before that day. He was a long-legged brown, with

scanty mane and a wicked, rolling eye. He looked capable of almost any deviltry, but Andy did not give much time to speculating upon what he would try to do. He was still all eyes to the infield, where his predecessor was gyrating. Then, a sudden jump loosened him so that he grabbed the horn—and it was all over with that particular applicant, so far as the purse and the championship belt were concerned. He was out of the contest, and presently he was also back at the corral, explaining volubly—and uselessly—just how it came about. He appeared to have a very good reason for "pulling leather," but Andy was not listening, and only thought absently that the fellow was a fool to make a talk for himself.

Andy was clutching the stirrup and watching a chance to put his toe into it, and the tall brown horse was circling backward, with occasional little side jumps. When it was quite clear that the horse did not mean to be mounted, Andy reached out his hand, got a rope from somebody—he did not know who, though, as a matter of fact, it was Pink who gave it—and snared a front foot; and, presently, the brown was standing upon three legs instead of four, and the gaping populace wondered how it was done, and craned necks to see. After that, though the horse still circled backward, Andy got the stirrup, and put his toe in it, and went up so easily that the ignorant might think anybody could do it. He dropped the rope, and saw that it was Pink who picked it up.

The brown, at first, did nothing at all. Then he gave a spring straight ahead, and ran fifty yards or so, stopped, and began to pitch. Three jumps, and he ran again; stopped and reared. It was very pretty to look at, but Happy Jack could have ridden him, or Slim, or any other range rider. In two minutes, the brown was sulking, and it took some spurring to bring him back to the corral. Pitch he would not. The crowd applauded, but Andy felt cheated, and looked as he felt.

Pink edged toward him, but Andy was not in the mood for reconciliation, and kept out of his way. Others of the Happy Family came near, at divers times and places, as if they would have speech with him, but he thought he knew about what they would say, and so was careful not to give them a chance. When the excitement was all over for that day, he got the despised hired horse, and went back to town with Billy Roberts, because it was good to have a friend, and because they wanted to talk about the riding. Billy did not tell Andy, either, that he had had hard work getting away from his own crowd; for Billy was kind-hearted, and had heard a good deal, because he had been talking with Happy Jack. His sympathy was not with the Happy Family, either.

On the second afternoon, there were but nine men to ride, such was the effect of the rigid winnowing. The fellow who had grabbed the saddle horn, together with ten others, stood among the spectators, and looked on; a few made caustic remarks about the management, the horses, the nine who were left, and the whole business in general. Andy grinned a little, and wondered if he would stand among them on the morrow and make remarks. He was not worrying about it, though. He said "Hello," to Weary, Pink, and Cal Emmett, and saddled a kicking, striking brute from up Sweetgrass way.

On this day the horses were wickeder, and one man came near getting his neck broken. As it was, his collarbone snapped, and he was carried off the infield on a stretcher, and hurried to the hospital; which did not tend to make the other riders feel more cheerful. Andy noted that it was the HS sorrel which did the mischief, and glanced meaningly across at Billy Roberts.

Then it was his turn, with the striking, kicking gray, and he mounted and prepared for what might come. The gray was an artist in his line, and pitched "high, wide, and crooked," in the most approved fashion. But Andy, being also an artist of a sort, rode eas-

ily and with grace that brought much handclapping from the crowd. Only the initiated reserved their praise till further trial; for, though the gray was not to say gentle, and, though it took skill to ride him, there were a dozen —probably twice as many—men in the crowd who could have done as well.

The Happy Family, drawn together from habit, and because they could speak their minds more freely, discussed Andy gravely among themselves. Betting was growing brisk, and if their faith had not been so shaken they could have got long odds on Andy.

"I betche he don't win out," Happy Jack insisted, with characteristic gloom. "Yuh wait till he goes up agin' that blue roan. They're savin' that roan till the las' day—and I betche Andy'll git him, if he hangs on till the las' day." Happy Jack laughed ironically, as he made the provision.

"Any you fellows got money yuh want to put up on this deal?" came the voice of Andy behind them.

They turned, a bit shamefaced, toward him.

"Aw, I betche——" began Happy.

"That's what I'm here for," cut in Andy. "What I've got goes up—saddle, spurs—*all* I've got. You've done a lot uh mourning, now here's a chance to break even on *me*. Speak up."

The Happy Family hesitated.

"I guess I'll stay out," dimpled Pink. "I don't just savvy your play, Andy, and if I lose on yuh—why, it won't be the first time I ever went broke."

"Well, by golly, I'll take a chance," bellowed Slim, whose voice was ever pitched to carry across a herd. "I'll bet yuh fifty dollars yuh don't pull down that belt or purse. By golly, there's two or three men here that can *ride*."

"There's only one that'll be the real star," smiled Andy, with unashamed egotism. "Happy, how rich do *you* want to get off me?"

Happy said a good deal and "betche" several things would happen—things utterly inconsistent with one another. In the end, Andy pinned him down to twenty-five dollars against Andy's silver-mounted spurs—which was almost a third more than the spurs were worth; but Andy had no sympathy for Happy Jack, and stuck to the price doggedly, till Happy gave in.

Jack Bates advertised his lack of faith in Andy ten dollars' worth, and Cal Emmett the same. Irish, coming in on the afternoon train, and drifting instinctively to the vicinity of the Happy Family, cursed them impartially for a bunch of quitters, slapped Andy on the back, and, with impetuosity, offered a hundred dollars to anybody, who dared take him up, that Andy would win. And this before he had heard more than a rumor of the blue roan, or a report of the two rides already made in the contest.

It is true that Happy Jack endeavored to enlighten him, but Irish glared at him in a way to make Happy squirm and stammer incoherently.

"I ain't heard nothing about it," Irish cut in, "and I don't have to hear. I know a rider when I see one, and my money's on Andy, from start to finish. You make me sick. Weary, have *you* gone against your man?" The tone was a challenge in itself.

Weary grinned good-naturedly. "I haven't pulled down any bets," he answered mildly, "and I haven't put up my last cent, and don't intend to. I'm an engaged young man." He shrugged his shoulders, to point the moral. "I sure do hope Andy'll win out," he added simply.

"*Hope?* Why, damn it, yuh *know* he'll win!" snarled Irish.

Men in their vicinity caught the belligerence of the tone, and turned about, thinking there was trouble, and the Happy Family subsided into quieter discussion. In the end, Irish, discovering that Andy, for the time being, had forsworn the shelter of the Flying U tents, stuck by him loyally, and forswore it, also, and went with Andy to share the doubtful comfort of the obscure lodging house. For Irish was all or nothing, and to find the Happy

Family publicly opposed—or at most neutral—to a Flying U man in a rough-riding contest like this, incensed him much.

The Happy Family began to feel less sure of itself, and a bit ashamed—though of just what they were not quite clear, for surely they had reason aplenty for doubting Andy Green.

The last day found the Happy Family divided against itself, and growing somewhat venomous in its remarks. Andy had not done anything remarkable as yet, except, perhaps, keeping in the running, when the twenty had been culled to three: Billy Roberts, Andy, and a man from the Yellowstone Valley, called Gopher by his acquaintances. Accident and untoward circumstances had thrown out the others—good riders, or they would not have been there. Happy Jack proclaimed loudly in camp that Andy was still in because Andy had not had a real bad horse. "I seen Coleman looking over the blue roan, and talkin' to them guys that runs things; they're goin' t' put Andy on him t'-day, I betche—and we seen how he can ride him! Piled in a heap——"

"Not exactly," Pink interrupted. "I seem to remember Andy lighting on his feet; and he was smoking when he started, and smoking when he quit. That's kinda funny, don't yuh think?"

So Pink went back to his first faith, and the Happy Family straightway became loud and excited over the question of whether Andy did really light upon his feet, or jumped up immediately, and whether he kept his cigarette, or made a new one. The discussion carried them to the fair grounds, and remained just where it started, so far as any amicable decision was concerned.

Now, this is a fair and true report of that last day's riding. There being but the three riders, and the excitement growing apace, the rough-riding was put first on the programme, and men struggled for the best places and the best view of the infield.

In the beginning, Andy drew the HS sorrel, and Billy Roberts the blue roan. Gopher, the Yellowstone man, got a sulky little buckskin, that refused to add one whit to the excitement, so that he was put back and another one brought. This other proved to be the wicked-eyed brown which Andy had ridden the first day. Only this day the brown was in different mood, and pitched so viciously that Gopher lost control in the rapid-fire changes, and rode wild, being all over the horse, and everywhere but on the ground. He did not pull leather, however, though he was accused by some of riding on his spurs at the last. At any rate, Andy and Billy Roberts felt that the belt lay between themselves, and owned as much privately.

"You've sure got to ride like a wild man if yuh beat me to it," grinned Billy.

"By gosh, I'm sure after it myself," Andy retorted. "I've just got to have it, Bill."

Billy, going out to ride, made no reply except a meaning headshake. And Billy certainly rode, that day; for the blue roan did his worse and his best. To describe the performance, however, would be to invent many words to supply a dearth in the language. Billy rode the blue roan back to the corral, and he had broken none of the stringent rules of the contest—which is saying much for Billy.

When Andy went out—shot out, one might say—on the sorrel, the Happy Family considered him already beaten, because of the remarkable ride of Billy. When the sorrel began pitching, the gaping populace, grown wise overnight in these things, said that he was *e-a-s-y*—which he was not. He fought as some men fight; with brain, as well as muscle, cunningly, malignantly. He would stop, and stand perfectly still for a few seconds, and then spring viciously whichever way would seem to him most unexpected; for he was not bucking from fright, but because he hated men, and would do them injury if he could.

When the crowd thought him worn out, so that he stood with head drooping, all that Andy would permit, then it was that Andy grew most wary. It

was as he had said. Of a sudden, straight into the air leaped the sorrel, reared and went backward in a flash of red. But, as he went, Andy slipped to one side; and, when the sorrel struck the ground, Andy struck also —on his feet. "Get up, darn yuh," he muttered, and, when the sorrel gathered himself together, and jumped up, he was much surprised to find Andy in the saddle again.

Then it was that the HS sorrel went mad, and pitched as he had never pitched before, even when building his record. Then it was that Andy, his own temper a bit roughened by the murderous brute, rode as he had not ridden for many a day; down in the saddle, his quirt keeping time with the jumps. He was just settling himself to "drag it out of him proper," when one of the judges, on horseback in the field, threw up his hand.

"Get off," he shouted, galloping closer. "That horse's got to be rode again to-day. You've done enough this time."

So Andy, watching his chance, jumped off when the sorrel stopped for a few seconds to breathe, and left him unconquered, and more murderous than ever. A man with a megaphone was announcing that the contest was yet undecided, and that Green and Roberts would ride again later in the afternoon.

Andy passed the Happy Family, head in air, stopped a minute to exchange threats with Billy Roberts, and went, with Irish, to roost upon the fence near the judges' stand to watch the races. The Happy Family kept sedulously away from the two, and tried to grow interested in other things until the final test.

It came, when Billy Roberts, again first, mounted the HS sorrel, still in murderous mood, and but little the worse for his previous battle. What he had done with Andy he repeated, and added much venom to the repetition. Once he threw himself backward, which Billy expected, and so got clear, and remounted as he scrambled up.

Then the sorrel simply pitched so hard and so fast that he loosened Billy a bit; not much, but enough to "show daylight" between rider and saddle for two or three high, crooked jumps. One stirrup he lost, rode a jump without it, and, by good luck, regained it as it flew against his foot. It was great riding, and a gratifying roar of applause swept out to him when it was over.

Andy, saddling the blue roan, drew a long breath. This one ride would tell the tale, and he was human enough to feel a nervous strain such as had not before assailed him. It was so close, now—and it might soon be so far. A bit of bad luck such as may come to any man, however great his skill, and the belt would go to Billy. But not for long did doubt or questioning hold Andy Green. He led The Weaver out himself, and, instinctively, he felt that the horse remembered and would try all that was in him. Also, he was somehow convinced that the blue roan held much in reserve, and that it would be a great fight between them for mastery.

When he gathered up the reins, the roan eyed him wickedly sidelong, and tightened his muscles, as it were, for the struggle. Andy turned the stirrup, put in his toe, and went up in a flash, warned by something in the blue roan's watchful eye. Like a flash, the blue roan also went up—but Andy was a fraction of a second quicker. There was a squeal that carried to the grand stand as the blue roan, wild-eyed, and with red, flaring nostrils, pounded the wind-baked sod with high, bone-racking jumps; changed, and took to "weaving" till one wondered how he kept his footing—more particularly, how Andy contrived to sit there, loose-reined, firm-seated, riding easily. The roan, tiring of that, began "swapping ends" furiously and so fast one could scarce follow his jumps. Andy, with a whoop of pure defiance, yanked off his hat and beat the roan over the head with it, yelling taunting words and contemptuous; and for every shout the roan bucked harder and higher, bawling like a new-weaned calf.

Men who knew good riding went silly, and yelled and yelled. Those who did not know anything about it caught the infection, and roared. The judges galloped about, backing away from the living whirlwind, and yelling with the rest. Came a lull, when the roan stood still, because he lacked breath to continue, and the judges shouted an uneven chorus.

"Get down; the belt's yours"—or words to that effect. It was unofficial, that verdict, but it was unanimous.

Andy turned his head, and smiled acknowledgment. "All right—but wait till I tame this hoss proper; him and I've got a point to settle." Again the battle raged, and again the crowd, not having heard the unofficial decision, howled and yelled approval of the spectacle.

Not till the roan gave up completely and owned obedience to rein and voiced command, did Andy take further thought of the reward. He satisfied himself that he was master, and that the blue roan recognized him as such. He wheeled and turned as if "cutting out" an imaginary animal from an imaginary herd; he loped and he walked, stopped dead still in two jumps and started in one. He leaned and ran his gloved hand forgivingly along the slaty blue neck, reached farther, and pulled, facetiously, the roan's ears, and the roan permitted, meekly, the liberties. He half turned in the saddle, and slapped the plump hips, and the roan never moved. "Why, you're an all-right little hoss," praised Andy, slapping again and again.

The decision was being bellowed from the megaphone; and Andy, hearing it thus, officially, trotted over to where a man was holding out the belt that proclaimed him champion of the State. Andy reached out a hand for the belt, buckled it around his middle, and saluted the grand stand as he used to do from the circus ring, when one André de Gréno had performed his most difficult feat.

The Happy Family crowded up, shamefaced and manfully willing to own themselves wrong.

"We're down, and ready to be walked on by the champion," Weary announced quizzically. "Mamma mine! but yuh sure can ride."

Andy looked at them, grinned, and did an exceeding foolish thing, just to humiliate Happy Jack, who, he afterward said, still looked unconvinced. He coolly got upon his feet in the saddle, stood so, while he saluted the Happy Family mockingly, lighted the cigarette he had just rolled, then, with another derisive salute, turned a double somersault in the air, and lighted upon his feet on the ground—and the roan did nothing more belligerent than turn his head and eye Andy suspiciously.

"By gosh, maybe you fellows'll some day own up yuh don't know it all!" he cried to the amazed Happy Family, and led the blue roan back into the corral and away from the whooping maniacs across the track.

THE SIZE OF ICEBERGS

AT one time it was believed that an iceberg that towered one hundred feet above water measured at least seven hundred feet below the surface. Although it is true that the heavier portion of the iceberg is below water, it is wrong to say that for every cubic foot of ice above water there are at least six or seven below. Sometimes bergs are encountered of which only two-thirds of the total bulk is submerged.

Until quite recently, it was generally believed that it was pressure from behind that caused masses of ice to become detached and float away as a berg. We now know that the breaking off of blocks from the parent glacier is produced solely by the action of the tides. Generally speaking, they travel at the rate of three to four miles an hour.

Exit the Black Ranger

By Epes Winthrop Sargent

Ideas are the best capital you can have. Here is a little story of a hotel proprietor whose brilliant idea alarmed the country but brought an abundance of guests. The final outcome was a surprise to the ingenious proprietor—as it will be to you

"TED," said Bannister, the plump proprietor of the Pannamint House, "how would you like to become a bandit—turn robber, you know?"

Ted Curley eyed Bannister a moment, waiting for the rest of the joke, but Bannister remained silent.

Ted lazily stirred his length of limb. "I never did hanker for to go into the hotel business," he drawled. "Guidin's good enough for me."

"If that's a joke, it's a poor one," retorted Bannister curtly. "Of course, if you want to loaf this season, we'll say no more about it. You told me a moment ago that you wanted to work around here this winter."

"So I do," assented Curley, "but I was asking for a job guiding."

"There will be no parties to guide unless we do something," said Bannister, with a shake of his bald head. "Down on the coast, the hotels are filling up. I don't think the tourists are going to care for the mountains this year. I've got to do something, and I thought you might be willing to help—seeing that it will pay more than guiding."

"Bring it out into the light where I can get a good look at it," invited Curley, beginning to take a mild interest in the talk.

"It's this way," explained Bannister, hitching his chair closer and lowering his voice. "As I was telling you, the lookout is bad this season. They all want to go to the shore this year. It's up to me and that new chap I got for press agent to get some advertisement.

"If I was running a shore place, I could fake a sea serpent. I did that one year up on the Maine coast. But here I am two hundred miles from water, and that won't work. I thought that we might get up a new idea. This is the scheme. You're tanned enough to look like an outlaw, and you've been guiding long enough to know how to act. Pretty soon there will be stories in the papers about the gentleman robber in the Pannamint range, and all about his courtesy to women—that always fetches them. There'll be a line, too, about my insisting on repaying all losses, and that will look well, too. You only take money—that's your eccentricity."

"That's my habit—when I can get it," corrected Curley firmly, "but go ahead."

"You turn it back to me," Bannister continued. "I'll pay you a salary and find your grub. We can fix up that cave I had blasted out to find Indian relics in, and you can live there. I'll give you sixty dollars a month and grub."

"You'll give me one hundred dollars and good grub, and I want Wednesday and Saturday off."

"Sixty and Sunday off. If the scheme works you can talk about a raise afterward."

"Sixty with Sunday *and* Wednesday," compromised Curley, "and a raise if it works out."

"Make it that way," conceded Bannister. "I'll give you all the pointers you need."

"You can," assented Curley. "Any man what charges two bits a drink for the sort of whisky you sell can give points to any robber in the business. When do I start?"

"Right away," declared Bannister. "I'll get Nevins on the job at once. Come around in the morning, and we'll look the cave over."

Nevins, the pallid little press agent, "got on the job" the same day, and many of the Eastern papers carried a press dispatch announcing the presence in the range of "the famous Black Ranger."

Almost daily, during the next few weeks, there appeared stories of the Ranger's exploits, and gradually he was drawn closer to the hotel, until there came the announcement that he had apparently found a safe refuge in the vicinity of the hotel, whence he plundered the patrons of Bannister's hostelry.

A man was hired in San Francisco to come down and be kidnapped during his week's vacation from the stock broker's office in which he found employment, and the stories of the capture wound up with the statement that Bannister had paid the ransom, determined that no patron should suffer from the depredations of the Black Ranger.

A similar statement was added to Bannister's advertisements in the magazines and Eastern newspapers; and presently it came to be the proper thing to include the Pannamint House in the California trip, and the coast hotels suffered.

Once or twice a week, the sheriff and his special posse ranged the mountain on some alleged clue, and the guests watched the man hunt from the hotel piazzas, and voted it exciting in the extreme. Now and then, some hunter of experience would suggest that the gunshots suggested blank cartridges, but in every gathering there will be some scoffers, and the hints found small credence.

Bannister even arranged with a motion-picture company to make a man-hunt film—a film which was a thriller in the vaudeville theatres through the country. Bannister, with a fine sense of the dramatic, had arranged with Curley to hold up the operator himself; and the sudden appearance of the bandit with a gun in either hand, advancing toward the camera, was a most convincing touch.

The Pannamint House was crowded, now; and the increased rate of ten dollars a day was willingly paid by credulous tourists. Now and then some traveler cut down expenses by magnifying the sum of which he had been robbed, and Bannister could not very well tax him with falsehood, though it was most irritating to pay out a couple of hundred to some victim of the Ranger, and have Curley turn in only fifteen or twenty.

"It's one of the reasons I can't raise your salary," he explained, when Curley reopened that ever interesting subject. "It's more expensive in every way than I expected. The sheriff gets twenty-five dollars every time he turns out, and there's another five dollars for each of the posse. Now you tell me that you got eighteen dollars from young Lumley, and he got one hundred and forty dollars from me."

"I might give each man a receipt," suggested Curley hopefully; but Bannister vetoed the idea; and, much disappointed, Curley went back to the cave in which Bannister had been used to "plant" fictitious Indian relics.

He knew that the Pannamint House was doing a big business for the first time in its history, and two dollars a day seemed very little on Wednesdays and Saturdays when he rode over to the tiny railroad town, where he could mingle with his fellow men.

He was playing straight with Bannister, turning in his entire collections every evening. He knew that Bannister was making so much money that he contemplated building an addition to the place, and he felt that twenty-five dollars a week was not too much to the man who made this prosperity possible.

It was hard work, at times, eluding the sheriff and his posse, and it was lonesome work living in a cave.

But Bannister turned a deaf ear to all his arguments. Every day he was compelled to refuse guests because there was no room for them; and, when an architect came from Los Angeles with the plans for the new addition, he was too deeply engrossed to heed the warning of Grismer, his head clerk, that a recently arrived millionaire from Chicago was about to go out for a walk.

"He's got five one-thousand-dollar bills in his pocket," declared Grismer, with a dubious shake of the head. "I can't get him to put it in the safe. Can't you come and talk him into it? He's in the office now. It's that Coddington, from Chicago."

"Curley's all right; and, anyhow, it's his day off," reminded Bannister. "I'll see Coddington to-night, and tell him I won't be responsible for any such sum unless he puts it in the safe. Mr. Kinney has to start in time to catch the night train, and I've got to go over these plans with him. Don't interrupt us again."

He went back to the blue prints, and Grismer went to his desk with an air of resignation. Curley had been playing fair, but he had not yet had so much money to play with.

Some hours later, Bannister saw Kinney drive off in the stage to the railroad. He returned to the office, to encounter an excitable group about Coddington, who was relating with great detail how he had captured the Black Ranger. Then he had dropped his gun, and, before he could recover it, the tables had been turned, and he had been relieved of nearly six thousand dollars.

"It's all right, though," he concluded. "I'm guaranteed against loss, and I've got the bandit's receipt for every penny. I just told him how things stood, and he saw the point and signed the receipt. A very decent chap, that Black Ranger. How about this, landlord?"

"I'll have to give you a check," apologized Bannister. "I just sent the money to the bank yesterday."

There was a buzz of approval as Bannister briskly stepped behind the desk to write out the check, and Bannister smiled. The money would be in the safe that evening.

But, later, he began to worry. It was Curley's day off, and he had said nothing about wanting to take Thursday instead. He decided to look into the affair, and presently he slipped out of a rear entrance, and, by a devious route, made his way to Curley's cave.

It needed but a glance to see that Curley had decamped. All of his personal belongings were gone, and there was a note on the table. With a white face, Bannister sank into a chair; and, by the light of his lantern, read the note, which ran:

DEAR BOSS: Im goin away. Im tired of beein a bandit. I got the rumatism sleepin in the cave and its no fun running with the rumatism and the sherif after you. You neednt send me this months pay. I got sum from a chap jest now. I gues maybe youl play fair with the next man you hire. You dont send no one after me an I wont spoil the game. TED.

Slowly Bannister retraced his steps toward the Pannamint House. He would have to cancel the order for the new addition, and business would fall off again. The Black Ranger had made his exit, carrying with him Coddington's money and the remnants of Bannister's faith in mankind.

The Abduction of Robert Kenney

By William E. Tribit

It is not very difficult to kidnap a man, but it takes extraordinary skill to kidnap a railroad car as well. In this surprising story you'll read how man and car disappeared by a scheme as ingenious as it was startling. Among other results, the kidnapped man adds a new chapter to his philosophy, based upon the saying: "We give a chance and take a chance."

(*A Complete Novelette*)

THE rate war between the two great railways had grown so bitter that a crisis was imminent. It was a contest of supremacy between the railway kings, Peter Schley of the A. & P., and Robert Kenney of the E. & W. Schley was getting worsted. In desperation he wired his western division manager, James Fox, to come to New York. An idea had occurred to him, born of the crisis which he faced, and Fox was the bold spirit that could be trusted to carry it into execution.

It was never Schley's method to broach a scheme directly. He approached it in a roundabout way, so that if it miscarried, the trail would not lead back to himself. When Fox was ushered into his private office, prepared to discuss routine matters, Schley assumed a confidential tone.

"Jim," he said, "the board of directors is hammering me constantly about the steady loss in freight receipts. Unless this rate war is terminated, we won't be able to declare a dividend. Have you anything to suggest?"

Fox shook his head.

Schley, nervously brushing cigar ashes from his vest, resumed:

"Kenney is going on his western inspection trip the latter part of next month. I happen to know that his health is bad, and that he is undertaking this trip against the advice of his physician."

Fox shot a questioning look at the imperturbable face of his chief, but said nothing.

"I would be extremely sorry to hear that Kenney had collapsed on the way out," Schley insinuated. "And yet such a thing is possible. Oh, yes, quite possible, Jim."

"I don't wish him bad luck," Fox exclaimed with heat, "but I hope something happens so he won't be able to get back until we beat him out on this rate question."

"By the way, Jim," said Schley irrelevantly, "there's a man on the western division that caused the first orange shipment over the E. & W. to disappear. I believe those cars were never found."

"Meaning me?" laughed Fox, pleased by the allusion.

"Meaning you." Schley puffed complacently on his big, black cigar. "Strange how cars get lost," he mused. "Do you know, Jim, I was just thinking how easily this rate war could be settled if by some inexplicable accident the car containing Mr. Kenney should get lost and not turn up for several

months! Of course there's not one chance in a million of such a mishap occurring; is there, Jim?"

"In other words, Mr. Schley," said Fox, who caught the drift of his chief's thought, "Kenney is in the way, and the A. & P.'s only salvation is to sidetrack him." Then he blazed out: "Do you appreciate what it would mean to me if the newspapers ran a headline to this effect: 'James Fox, western division manager of the A. & P., receives a life sentence for kidnapping——'"

"Kidnapping! Who used that ugly word? Certainly not I," interrupted Schley in mock surprise. Ashes from his cigar cascaded down his expansive chest. As he swept them off with a fat hand, he continued:

"I merely stated a supposition. If some foolhardy employee with the interests of our road at heart, should contrive temporarily to relieve us of Kenney's presence for about three months, we would not lose any sleep over it. Our directors most certainly would not countenance such a high-handed outrage—and you could not expect me to approve of it."

"Well, I'll be——" Fox started to exclaim, but Schley went on smoothly:

"It would be a most reprehensible act, and I am confident no employee of the road would be guilty of it—even if he knew there was a vice-presidency awaiting him for meritorious service."

Fox's eyes sparkled. Then he became grave.

"This means the penitentiary if it is traced to me—I presume I am to be the man to do it. I have a wife and three kids."

"The man who would do a self-sacrificing action could not afford to make a failure. While we would condemn a rash employee, we would consider it our duty to stand by him if he got in difficulties. Excessive zeal often has been responsible for heroic deeds."

Schley pressed the buzzer, an indication that the conference was at an end. Fox arose to depart. The chief clerk entered, in response to the summons, and President Schley, as though concluding a conversation with Fox on a routine matter, curtly said:

"Mr. Fox, it's got to stop. We must ship more freight over your division or pay your salary to another manager." Turning to the chief clerk, he directed:

"Write Simpson that Fox will go over the crop reports with him. That is all, Mr. Fox. Good morning."

"Good morning, Mr. Schley," replied Fox.

In the office of the chief clerk, the latter said:

"Old man a little crusty, eh? I could have told you that when you came in. He has spilled ashes over his shirt a dozen times this morning, which is always a sign of bad humor."

"I expected a wigging," said Fox.

II.

On the way downtown, Fox mused deeply over the titanic task set him by Schley. He had not been associated with him ten years without knowing his methods. He knew that Schley would plan so that not a shadow of suspicion would fall on himself, if the plot miscarried.

Schley was one of the shrewdest men in the railway business. But in Kenney he had met his match. The methods of the two vastly differed. Schley stalked his prey through the grass and the brush. Kenney swooped down upon them. One was the tiger, stealthy and remorseless. The other was the eagle, swift and unerring. Schley was short, stout, gray-bearded, and benevolent looking. Kenney was tall, thin, dyspeptic, a bundle of nervous energy. Long side whiskers, which he fondled in moments of abstraction, framed a fighting chin.

As Fox compared the two giants and tried to map out a plan of action, the remark of a passenger on the elevated train caught his attention. The man was telling a friend that the jury had found the prisoner guilty and he had been sentenced to twenty years in the penitentiary. Fox bought an afternoon paper, and in glaring headlines he read

of the quick sentence to life imprisonment of a notorious kidnapper.

Westbound that evening, he was engaged in conversation by a fellow passenger in the smoking compartment of the Pullman. He commented on the great crimes of the day, remarking that a man is a fool to engage in any undertaking that has the penitentiary at the end. Later, as Fox settled back in the comfortable Pullman chair to read, the song of the wheels drummed in his ears.

"Pen-i-tent-iary! Pen-i-tent-iary! Pen-i-tent-iary!" The word came to him as distinctly as though uttered by human voice.

He tossed the newspaper aside and held up before his mental gaze the prize, a vice-presidency, for carrying out the wishes of his chief. It dazzled him. He began to build air castles. But he could not keep out the song of the car wheels. It got on his nerves, and for the first time in years Fox had a troubled sleep. He dreamed of an ignominious arrest, trial, and conviction for some great crime, the details of which he could not remember when he awoke in the morning.

A substantial breakfast drove away the lingering memory of the dream; the song of the wheels was in a more cheerful strain. Fox began to plot, and when he dropped off the train at division headquarters, three days later, he could not find a weak spot in his arrangements to kidnap the railway magnate.

He delved into the business that had accumulated during his absence in the East, and when it had been cleaned up, sent privately for Benson, manager of the Diamond S ranch.

Broad-shouldered and long-limbed, Benson was an easy-going giant with an acquired antipathy for railroad men. Twelve years before, he "beat" his way to the cow country after numerous encounters with husky freight brakemen. He had been knocked down and kicked off the tops of moving box cars, battered with lanterns, and pelted with lumps of coal. Fox had heard Benson relate his rough experiences at the hands of brakemen; he also knew he hated the E. & W. because it had discriminated against him in the shipment of cattle.

Fox greeted Benson in the hearty Western fashion, and after a few preliminary remarks, said:

"I sent for you, Benson, because I know you love a joke and, what is more to your liking, to give you an opportunity to get even with an ancient enemy.

"Do you remember that brakeman on the E. & W. who tried to murder you when you were beating your way out here; that burly cuss who nearly stove your ribs in?"

"Sure I do; I hung around the yards for a week waitin' for him to come back. Is he the guy the joke's goin' to be on?"

"He's the guy, but he's not a brakeman now. They promoted him. I guess he had a pull. I don't like him any more than you do; he tried to queer me, and I have a chance to play him a trick. It's been tipped off to me," continued Fox, lying smoothly, "that he's coming West to get an option for a right of way through the cattle country."

"Is, eh?" growled Benson. "We'll run him back East pretty darn quick."

"That's exactly what I don't want. Now, keep quiet and listen while I sketch a little drama in which you can participate. As I said, he is coming here to get a right of way for the E. & W. His mission is secret. He will come on the Limited the latter part of next month and drop off in the neighborhood of Windy Pass. Now, where you come in will be shortly after that."

Fox paused to hand a cigar to Benson and light a fresh one for himself. He knew the cattle country thoroughly, and was popular with the cattle men. A score of cowboys, under obligations to him for courtesies extended, would eagerly aid him in any enterprise that reeked of danger. Rapidly reviewing every detail of the plot, and seeing no possibility of failure, Fox resumed:

"He has arranged for a horse, and I will have him suplied with one that

has run off your ranch—we will say the piebald that is safe enough for a tenderfoot to ride. You will start out on a hot trail and overtake the 'thief' who, in all probability, will be disguised as a cowboy. You know what to do. Yells, a few shots in the air, the thief yanked off the piebald at the end of a lariat, and then the march to the nearest tree. Say, old man, can you see that poor, shivering wretch in the hands of cursing cowboys, trying to remember the prayer he said at his mother's knees, while the lariat is thrown over the limb of a tree and you make ready to string him up?"

Benson grinned. "That'll be about the time, I guess, to make a touchin' allusion to the ribs he tried to kick in. I suppose the curtain rings down then, and the second act comes on with yours truly takin' to the scrubby pines."

"The curtain is still up. There is a grand finale. The sheriff rescues the prisoner——"

"Excuse me, Jim," exclaimed Benson, getting out of the chair with remarkable celerity, considering his huge bulk. "I don't play no rôles, especially hangin' horse thieves with a sheriff droppin' in promiscuous like. Excuse me."

Fox laughed heartily.

"Drop into that seat again and listen. This is a little drama for your benefit. The sheriff always arrives in the nick of time when you're looking at a play on the stage. This is going to be a stage sheriff. He rides up with his posse, takes the prisoner away from you and your men, consults an official-looking document, runs his eyes shrewdly over the shaking wretch, nods his head, and exclaims: 'Pat Bledsoe—wanted for embezzlement,' orders him handcuffed, and gallops off with a wave of his hand to you. Then the curtain rings down on the first act, and you can take your old piebald home and sleep in peace. *We* do the rest."

"Sure you ain't goin' to ring in a real sheriff?"

"I'll give you my word for it," earnestly declared Fox. "If any one should nose around for information—why your horse *was* stolen, and you did catch a stranger riding him. As for the little necktie party arranged for him, hanging a horse thief happens every once in a while in this country."

"All right, I'm game, if it's goin' to help you. But it appears to me he's gettin' off cheap for what he done to me."

"I will promise you this, Benson; he'll get all that's coming to him before I'm through."

III.

While Fox was plotting, his unconscious victim was vastly disturbed by the sensation the newspapers were making of an alleged breakdown in his health. Reporters were barred from the presence of the railway king, but the enterprising gentlemen of the press gathered fact and fancy from Wall Street, and wove them into a story that gained credence despite emphatic denials from E. & W. sources.

The climax came when it leaked out that Kenney's family physician had been hurriedly summoned to the magnate's private office. Doctor J. Boothby Haywood, bald and fussy, was interviewed and pooh-poohed anything more serious than a slight attack of indigestion. But bombarded with questions, Doctor Haywood admitted that his eminent patient was in danger of a breakdown. He had advised complete rest for a year; but President Kenney informed him emphatically this was impossible.

"This is strictly between us, boys," he appealed. "President Kenney is a wonderful man; a man of gigantic intellect who has been working under a full head of steam for many years. I assure you there is absolutely no organic weakness—nothing to be alarmed over. It is a source of annoyance to himself and his family to create a sensation over a little seizure that would pass unnoticed in another man. Of course, you will be guarded in what you print?"

Of course, they were not. There was a column interview with Doctor Haywood that made that eminent practitioner gasp; two columns dealing with

the rise and phenomenal career of the railway king, and a paragraph speculating who was best fitted to succeed to the presidency in case President Kenney was forced to retire. Some truth and much untruth there was in the daily life of the magnate as chronicled by the press.

The newspapers seized on this slight illness of a magnate and featured it because there was absolutely no sensation in the news market. And while managing editors growled because nothing worth while was happening for scareheads, the fates were hurrying President Kenney into total oblivion, a disappearance so baffling, so terrifying to the officials of the E. & W. Railway that the solution is here given for the first time. Obviously, it could not be explained by Schley, and Kenney never fathomed the mystery.

IV.

The night of April 2nd, something uncanny was taking place at Windy Pass. Shadowy forms passed and repassed; the clink of metal rang on the chill air. The sky was overcast with threatening snow clouds. By midnight, experienced men, not on the pay rolls of the E. & W., had repaired the siding laid by the E. & W. to the Last Hope mine, abandoned now more than two years. Switch rails, ready to be thrown into place, were concealed in the bushes. Fox's men, imported from the Mexican division of the A. & P., and to be shipped back after the siding had been put in the condition they found it, huddled behind rocks to keep warm. In the black, chill night they waited, the mysterious noises of the mountain fastnesses sounding weird in their ears; the brooding atmosphere punctured now and then by the haunting calls of coyotes.

The Limited, bearing President Kenney westward, was due at Windy Pass at two o'clock that morning. There was hardly one chance in a thousand that the crack engineer of the E. & W., who was in the cab of the engine that night, would detect the trap that had been laid. There was nothing to indicate that, a moment after the Limited passed, strange men would be busy making a connection from the main line to the abandoned siding. It was a steady upgrade from a point two miles east of Windy Pass to a spur of the mountain three miles west, around which the main line curved.

Fox had planned with devilish cunning. Two trusty men rode as passengers on the Limited from Chicago. The success of the plot hinged on their work at Summit Junction, thirty-five miles west of the Pass, where the mails were transferred. It would be their hazardous work to disconnect the "air" from the rear coach—Kenney's private car *Suwanee*—making the connection on the Pullman to which it was coupled. They were to do this after the engineer had tested the "air," previous to starting the train. It was a simple matter of turning off an angle cock and coupling the air hose on the last Pullman. The hazard lay in detection.

At the top of the grade, just before the Limited swung around the spur, these men were to cut Kenney's car loose by operating a lever allowing the president's car to drift back down the grade, over the improvised switch, and into the siding which ran down grade to the abandoned Last Hope mine.

V.

A flickering light on the overcast sky, a gleam on the rails, a tiny star momentarily growing larger and brighter, and the men at Windy Pass knew the Limited was approaching. Soon the earth trembled, and to the steady rumble of the wheels, the Limited went by.

"One-two-three-four-five-six-seven cars," the foreman counted.

The men broke from cover, brawny hands seized the switch, carried it to the main line, laid and spiked it, and waited.

Far up grade, a half circle of light showed, once, twice, three times—the signal agreed upon that the car was adrift.

"They've turned the trick," excitedly

exclaimed the foreman. "Move lively, men; it'll be here in no time."

The first flakes of snow fell fluttering.

"Providence is with us," chuckled the foreman. "By the time the car is missed, the ground will be covered with snow, and there won't be a trace of what we've done to-night."

Kenney's private car slipped smoothly down the grade, took the switch with a slight jar, and rolled along the siding, the rusted rails made slippery by the fast-falling snow. The foreman and two men swung lightly on the *Suwanee* as it came by. The same brawny men who had laid the switch, tore it out, removed the rails from the siding, rolled back rocks on the bed, threw the material on a hand car, and propelled it in the wake of the captured coach. The siding, to all purposes, appeared not to have been disturbed. Windy Pass, the scene of a most daring crime, was again a brooding solitude.

VI.

At two-twenty-nine a. m., the operator at XO signal tower, fifteen miles west of Windy Pass, reported to the train dispatcher at division headquarters:

Number Forty-seven—the Limited—passed two-twenty-eight. Rear signals not burning.

Operator Casey tossed the message to Assistant Train Dispatcher Wilson with the remark:

"That means a lay-off for somebody, if the old man gets to hear of it."

Wilson read the message with a serious face.

"Ask XO if he noticed the number of cars on Forty-seven."

"Why, you don't think Kenney's car has broken loose, do you?"

"Rush that," commanded Wilson. He was not taking any chances, with the president of the road traveling on his division.

Casey rattled the question off to XO. The reply came back instantly:

No. Orders only to look out for rear lights. Snowing hard.

Wilson spoke rapidly. "Forty-seven is due to pass the water tower at Y at two-thirty-five. Get the operator on the wire, and tell him to count the cars. Here, give me the key."

Taking Casey's place at the operating table, he began calling Y. Every night operator on the division had received strict orders to stick close to the key while the Limited was passing over the line. Wilson had not called twice before Y answered. Wilson wired:

To Operator Y: Count number cars on Forty-seven. Make no error.
(Signed) Wilson, A. T. D.

The operator at Y repeated the order and signed "O. K."—the usual formula. For a few moments, the ticking of the clock was the only sound heard in the dispatcher's office. Wilson wore a troubled look. The generally voluble Casey sat motionless. The office call sounded. Casey swung around to the table and grabbed a pen. Wilson listened to the telegraph instrument, scarcely breathing.

To Wilson, A. T. D.: Counted six cars. No rear signals shown.
(Signed) Campbell, Opr. Y.

"Great God, what does it mean!" exclaimed Wilson. He sprang to the telegraph key.

"Are you sure there were only six cars?" he wired rapidly.

"Absolutely certain," ticked back Campbell. "Conductor Kane, of way-freight, made same count—baggage, express, diner, and three Pullmans."

Casey, alert, waited for the order he knew was coming.

"Send an order to CN to hold up the Limited," said Wilson. "Wire the conductor to explain why the rear signals are not burning."

If the conductor of the Limited confirmed the reports from the two signal towers, there was only one conclusion, President Kenney's car had broken loose, Wilson thought. But in that case, the engineer would have known something was wrong with the "air," by the automatic whistle in the cab, and stopped the Limited to investigate. While he puzzled over the problem, he

acted. He gave a sharp order to the telephone clerk to get Superintendent Chambers on the wire. Chambers, aroused from slumber, answered the call in a sleepy voice. A few hurried words over the phone drove sleep from his eyes. When he reached the train dispatcher's office, perspiration streamed from his face.

Wilson made a brief explanation. The Limited, as Superintendent Chambers knew, carried seven cars, one of which was President Kenney's private coach *Suwanee*. The train report from Summit Junction showed the train intact leaving there. XO reported no signal lamps showing when the Limited passed the tower. The operator at Y was ordered to count the cars, and made six. His count was corroborated by Way-Freight Conductor Kane, who was sitting in the office. CN had been ordered to hold up the Limited for a report from the conductor. That was all Wilson had done, pending the summoning of the superintendent.

Chambers nodded approval. Consulting the train sheet, he figured that the Limited was due to pass CN at three-five. It was now three o'clock. He devoted the interval to ordering out the wrecking train from Summit Junction, directing the company surgeon at the Junction to accompany it. The wrecking train was to run carefully, and report as soon as possible.

"The operator at Y reports snow falling," Wilson volunteered.

"That is good," commented Chambers. "If the *Suwanee* has been derailed and slid down a gorge, traces will be found in the snow."

"I don't like the looks of this thing," said Wilson gloomily.

"It may be cleared up when we receive a report from the conductor of the Limited," replied Chambers in a brave voice.

The telegraph instrument ticked.

"There's Y calling," Wilson explained to Chambers.

Save for the noisy clatter of the telegraph instrument, there was tense silence in the dispatcher's office. As he read the message from the wire, Wilson's heart sank. His worst fears were realized. Taking the message from Casey, he read aloud to Chambers:

"Car *Suwanee* missing from train. Discovered its loss ten miles east of CN tower. No doubt exists that *Suwanee* was cut loose by experienced hand. Engineer reports air in perfect working order. Suspect it was cut out at Summit Junction, our last stop. President Kenney gave orders at Summit Junction not to be disturbed. Suspected nothing wrong until rear door of last Pullman was found locked and key missing. Snow obscured the glass. Thought best to run here for instructions.

"(Signed) NICHOLSON,
"Condr. Limited."

Chambers' face looked wan and drawn. His nervous chewing of an unlighted cigar evidenced deep perturbation of mind.

In a voice that shook, although he tried to steady it, he said:

"We can't hold the Limited, even for the president. Order Nicholson to proceed, and warn the train crew to say nothing. Order a special out of Summit Junction. Better have two surgeons accompany it. Instruct the engineer to look out for the wrecking train ahead."

Then Chambers wired the general manager a long code message, and paced up and down the office, waiting. Nothing could be done until the wrecking train had been heard from.

VII.

President Kenney's private secretary had been recalled East at Summit Junction by the fatal illness of his wife from ptomaine poisoning. His personal colored porter slipped into the diner to play craps with the waiters, after seeing his master retire. The fates decreed that he should be alone in his palatial car when the conspirators entered. Aroused from a light sleep when the coach stopped, President Kenney reached for the electric buzzer to inquire the cause, when he was confronted by three men, their features disguised by handkerchiefs.

Kenney's eyes blazed with anger. In icy tones, he asked:

"What is the meaning of this, if you please?"

"The meaning is," replied the leader, his gun leveled at the railway king's breast, "that you will get up and dress."

Kenney's bottled-up wrath exploded. Bounding up with a quickness that surprised the bandits, he rushed at the leader, tearing the disguise from his face.

"Damn you!" cried the latter, and he struck Kenney brutally in the face, knocking him senseless.

Whipping out a pair of scissors, he knelt; and when he straightened up, he held President Kenney's long side whiskers in his hand.

"I never did care for Dundrearies," he chuckled, tossing the severed whiskers aside.

Kenney's senses came back to him; he sat up with an effort, finally got on his feet; and, leaning heavily on the back of a chair for support, eyed the leader steadily.

"Try any more of your monkey shines," he was told, "and you'll get a ball through you. Jump into your clothes—quick!"

Kenney's gaze traveled from the bandit's steely eyes to the Colt's in his hand; whatever thought he had in mind gave way to reason. He proceeded to attire himself slowly, as a man trying to gain time.

"I'll give you two minutes to put them things on." The voice was full of menace. "If you're not ready, you go as you are."

"I am at your mercy, it appears." The railway king's voice was steady, but there was fury in his eyes. "What is your pleasure?"

Ignoring Kenney, the leader said to his men, who had finished ransacking the car:

"Beat it to the horses. Take his nibs along. I'll follow in a minute."

Kenney was led from the car, and hurried through the snow. An explosion boomed on the night air.

"I guess there goes good-by to about twenty-five thousand dollars," chuckled one of the men.

Kenney, boiling with rage, was looking for signs of the Limited. In the blackness of the night, he could see nothing. He thought the explosion was the blowing up of the safe in the express car. Even later, when the leader rejoined the trio, remarking: "If they ever find it, it will be by digging through several hundred tons of dirt and rock," it did not occur to Kenney that his palatial coach had been blown up in a mine by a stick of dynamite. As expostulation had been in vain, he attempted to reason with his captors, and impress upon them the enormity of their crime. He was gruffly ordered to keep his mouth shut.

The wind came keen and chill, piercing Kenney to the marrow. The snow soaked through his thin shoes. For an interminable time, the party trudged through the black night until, rounding into a cañon, the reflection of a light was seen on the rocks. A camp fire, a man, and five horses came into view.

"Hello! Where did you get that piebald?" asked the leader.

"Picked him up out there," waving a hand indefinitely to the north. "Thought he might come in handy to pack the loot."

Kenney was glad to warm his hands at the cheerful blaze. It occurred to him that these men were going to hold him for ransom, and his stout heart quailed. The brutal blow in the face had stunned his pride. For years his word had been law to thousands of men; in a fraction of time he realized what power meant when exercised by others. He was in the power of these bandits—truly a ridiculous plight for the acknowledged railway king. Look at them, he thought, squatting around the fire, drinking vile coffee——

"Take a swill," said one of the men, holding out a tin cup, as if in answer to his thought.

"Thank you, no," Kenney replied. The breeding of the aristocrat showed. He wondered how he could be polite to men who showed no courtesy to him.

The leader took out his watch. It was five minutes of four.

"Time to be moving," he said.

The horses were brought up, the fire stamped out, and the men mounted.

Kenney had not stirred.

"Climb up on that piebald," the leader ordered.

"How much longer is this farce to be played?" Kenney angrily exclaimed.

"Till we get tired of your company," was the blunt reply. "Get a move on, or I'll help you."

Brute force prevailed. The dignified president of a great railway obeyed, climbing into the saddle with difficulty in the dark. He sat erect, as men do who ride in parks. His captors lounged in the saddle like cowboys. Which way they went, whether north, south, east, or west, Kenney had no more idea than the man in the moon. Before the first gray tinge of dawn showed, he was sore in every joint.

The piebald was plodding along seemingly half asleep. A quirt was swung sharply on his flank, and he leaped forward so suddenly that Kenney would have been unseated had he not grasped the pommel with both hands. When the piebald finally slowed down from a gallop to a walk, Kenney, who marveled that he did not hear the other horses, glanced around. The sky had grown brighter; near objects could be distinguished. There was not a sign of his captors.

As day broadened, he saw more clearly. He was alone in a great valley. Just ahead was a clump of trees, and he urged the piebald toward them. As he drew near, a tall, thin, red-whiskered man, who looked friendly enough, rode out of the shadow. Before Kenney could frame an inquiry, the red-whiskered man hoarsely shouted:

"Hands up!"

Kenney's query died in his throat. He gazed almost stupidly at the horseman and the murderous-looking gun in his hand. When Kenney made no movement to comply, the revolver barked, and he heard the zip-zip of the bullet as it sped past his ear. He made an involuntary ducking motion, but he had learned the way of the plains. His hands went up.

Ranging alongside, the red-whiskered man dragged Kenney from the horse. Scowling down upon him, he ordered:

"Peel off them duds."

With the light of battle in his eyes, Kenney retorted:

"I don't propose to do anything of the kind."

"Get 'em off quick." This friendly looking, red-whiskered man had become a fiend in human shape. He was leaning from his saddle, glaring at Kenney. "You stole 'em from me to make a quick getaway."

"You contemptible, lying scoundrel!" thundered Kenney. "They are my own."

"Do I git 'em from you alive, or take 'em from you dead?" There was an ugly snarl on the red-framed face. He pointed the gun full at Kenney.

It was useless to resist. Kenney removed his coat and dropped it on the ground.

"Hand it up," roared the ruffian.

Kenney picked the coat up and threw it at him. The other clothing followed until Kenney stood shivering in his undergarments.

"Don't forgit them shoes."

"You brute, do you mean to leave me with no protection against the weather?"

"You robbed me, didn't you?" came the sneering reply. Snatching the shoes from Kenney's hand, the highwayman, wheeling, darted off.

Kenney, a miserable, shivering object, watched him fade away with a near approach to murder in his heart. He led the piebald to the trees in a despairing mood. During his busy career he had grappled difficulties apparently insurmountable, but never one so hopeless as the present. The horse shied at an object on the ground; and, with a return of hope, Kenney discovered a tumbled outfit. The clothes showed the effects of hard usage, and it was with repugnance that he put them on.

Ye gods, if Peter Schley could have seen him! If the New York newspapers had a snapshot of him as he now appeared! Slouch hat, woolen shirt, overalls, boots, and spurs. The masquerade was complete, even to belt, handkerchief for the neck, and chaps. He had seen pictures of cowboys wear-

ing chaps, and he regarded them as barbaric ornaments. So he tossed them aside.

Thus equipped, Kenney rode out from among the trees, bent on finding a habitation. The sun was about two hours high, and its rays felt good to his bruised body. So far as he could observe, he was the only human being in that vast valley. But even as he gazed, cursing inwardly, horsemen topped a rise some distance to the right. They approached at an easy lope, arms swaying in the manner of cowboys. A yell came down the wind to him, a yell with something sinister in it.

The piebald, plodding along, half asleep, as usual, woke to life so suddenly that Kenney was nearly unseated.

Behind him came the sound of hoofs, something sinuous, like a snake, circled over his head, dropped to his waist, tightened with a jerk, and for a breathless second Kenney seemed to be floating through the air. His body hit the ground with a crash. When his brain cleared, he looked up into the scowling faces of cowboys. The next moment he was scudding over the grass, the lariat tight across his chest.

Years ago, at a circus, Kenney had laughed, as a clown, lassoed, was dragged around the ring. The incident flashed through his mind, and he wondered how he found it amusing. When the lariat loosened, Kenney lay prone, recovering his breath. He toiled to his feet when a harsh command was given. The loop of the lariat had been thrown over the limb of a tree, and Kenney was placed beneath it.

"If you've any prayers to say, now is the time to git busy," said a broad-shouldered, long-limbed cowboy.

His recent experiences had taught Kenney the futility of asking questions. He did not blaze forth in anger, but with quiet dignity spoke to the giant.

"Will you allow me to make a statement?"

"Sure, fire ahead."

"It is this. You are committing a grave mistake, fraught with terrible consequences to yourself. I am Robert Kenney, president of the E. & W. Railway. I was held up and robbed in my private coach early this morning by three men, forced to go with them, turned adrift several hours later, held up by a highwayman, and compelled at the muzzle of a gun to remove my clothing which he rode away with. I found these clothes in this grove, and appropriated——"

"How do you happen to be ridin' this pony?"

"The three men who robbed me met a fourth at a camp fire. He evidently had been left with the party's horses. I was told to get on this horse. I heard the guard say he had picked him up."

"And the chap you say stole your clothes," exclaimed his captor, shaking a hairy fist under Kenney's nose, "was about as tall as you, and had red whiskers. Don't open your mouth to lie. That piebald is my pony, stolen out of the corral last night. That red-whiskered gent is 'Reds,' the slickest rustler in the West, and you're his pal. Let 'er go, boys," he concluded.

The loop was cast around the unhappy culprit's neck, a cowboy had his heel raised to drive the spur into his pony's side to pull the lariat, when the *pad-pad* of horses' feet was heard. The piebald's owner raised his hand as a signal to wait. Kenney, face to face with death, as he believed, breathed heavily.

A second party of horsemen hove in sight around the trees.

"Hell, it's the sheriff!" growled the giant. He slipped the noose from Kenney's neck, but not so quickly as to escape the hawklike eye of the official.

"Just in time to save the law from bein' busted wide open," he exclaimed.

His eye fastened on the culprit's face. An involuntary whistle escaped his lips. Pulling an official-looking paper from his shirt, he pondered over it; then, addressing the giant, he said:

"Benson, I'll take this job off your hands. I have a police description of this gent," indicating Kenney. "With your permission I'll read it."

"Sure," the cowboy assented. He was obviously pleased that he had made no mistake in regarding Kenney as an outlaw. "He told me he had been held up in his private car," he explained. "I believe he said he was President Kenney, of the E. & W. Railway." The cowboys laughed. "Oh, he got them duds"—catching the amused glance in the sheriff's eyes—"here in this clump of trees. He says 'Reds' stole his clothes, and he found these here. That piebald, which was stolen from my corral last night, he claims the hold-up men made him mount."

The sheriff roared with laughter.

"That's stepping some, but now, listen to this. Maybe he'll tell us it's his twin brother. You don't happen to know whether the railway king has a twin brother, Benson?"

Benson grinned, and shook his head.

Glancing now and then at Kenney, the sheriff read, in a solemn voice:

"ARREST.

"Wanted for stage robbing, Charles J. Simpson, alias James Hopper, alias Sam Hoskins, American, has blue eyes, prominent nose, brown hair, age, about 50; height, 5 feet 11 inches; weight, about 145 pounds. Is well educated, formerly a railroad brakeman. When last seen had shaved off whiskers. Five hundred dollars reward will be paid for his arrest and conviction.

"(Signed) WILLIAM NOBLE,
"Chief of Police, Dubois."

Kenney's spirits sank lower and lower as the sheriff read. The description tallied so exactly with himself that he could have cried aloud with mental anguish. Then, with a bound, hope revived. The man who was wanted, according to the police circular, had shaved off his whiskers, while his—he put up his hand to fondle them. Great God, they were gone!

The sheriff's keen eyes were on the unhappy man's face. There was conviction in his voice as he said:

"Boys, I guess there's no doubt you've caught the man described in this document. Put the bracelets on him," he ordered a deputy; and, under a strong guard, Charles J. Simpson, alias Hopper, alias Hoskins, alias Kenney, was taken to jail.

VIII.

General Manager Thayer, of the E. & W., read with consternation the code message from Superintendent Chambers, informing him of the mysterious disappearance of President Kenney. It was bewildering, incomprehensible. He received the message at his Chicago residence about daybreak. Wiring Chambers to advise him of the report from the wrecking train, he sent a messenger for Flenner, chief of the E. & W. detective staff.

That worthy reported at the general manager's house, much perturbed and out of breath. Only twice since his connection with the E. & W. had he been sent for in the dead of night, and both were memorable occasions. He was a tubby little man, with big, round eyes and an expression of perpetual astonishment on his fat face.

Thayer lost no time in preliminaries.

"President Kenney and his car *Suwanee* have disappeared from the Limited, somewhere between Summit Junction and CN tower," he said. "I want you to leave on Number Seventeen this morning, and report to Superintendent Chambers at western division headquarters. Make a thorough investigation. Here is Chambers' message to me, filled out."

"Yes, sir. Any further instructions?"

"No. If Chambers reports again to me before Seventeen leaves, I will have the message delivered to you at the station."

"Yes, sir."

Flenner ducked his head in salutation, and took his round, little body out of the library of the general manager. The tremendous news had not increased the look of astonishment on his fat face one iota. He ate a comfortable breakfast, packed his grip, and toddled off to the station. As the train pulled in, he was handed Chambers' second message to the general manager, reporting absolute failure on the part of the wrecking crew to discover the missing car, or the slightest clue to its whereabouts.

"Dear me, how dreadful!" he sighed.

Thirty-six hours later he softly entered Superintendent Chambers' private office, gently closed and locked the door, and pumped that harassed official dry of information. Had he any theory to advance? Chambers had not an idea; the car was gone; every inch of ground had been searched, and there was not a trace of it. Flenner suggested spontaneous combustion as a plausible explanation.

"Spontaneous hell!" sputtered Chambers. "Human hands cut the *Suwanee* loose. It's the boldest, most mystifying crime ever perpetrated. If the newspapers get wind of it, they will play it up as the greatest mystery of the age."

Flenner bowed himself out, and proceeded to Summit Junction, to interview the track walkers. Cassidy, patrolling the E. & W. tracks west from Summit Junction, said he had stepped aside for the Limited at a point ten miles east of Windy Pass, and noticed the rear signal lamps burning. Bonner, the track walker in the next section, said the Limited blew his hat off as it passed, sending it down the embankment, and he had gone after it.

"Signal lamps? Be jabers, I didn't look," he declared. "It was me hat I was lookin' afther."

Dolan, the third track walker interviewed, could not remember whether he noticed the signals or not.

Having narrowed the field to a point ten miles east of Windy Pass to one ten miles west of CN tower, Flenner asked Chambers for a special, and rode over the route taken by the *Suwanee* on the fatal morning. Then he disappeared for several days, and a fat, little tramp might have been seen ambling up and down the line, prowling into cañons, and talking with hoboes.

General Manager Thayer was half frantic as the days passed and the mystery remained unsolved. He peppered Flenner with red-hot code telegrams, wanting to know why he had not discovered something tangible to report.

When Flenner received a particularly scathing wire, he muttered: "If I report it as spontaneous combustion, they will think I'm crazy, but that's my conviction. There isn't a clue to go on. This job was done by brand-new criminals, and the smoothest I was ever up against."

Thayer was urged by other E. & W. officials to place the case in the hands of the Pinkertons, but he said no, it would arouse the suspicions of the newspapers.

"Some fool reporter is sure to bump into a Pinkerton he knows," he argued. "The fact that Flenner is nosing around out there signifies nothing more than an investigation into the looting of a freight car. It is utterly absurd that a coach should vanish from a moving train, and leave no trace, but that's the size of it."

"Of course, when Kenney does not arrive in San Francisco on the Limited, the newspaper men will want to know where he is. If questions are asked, let them be told that he is looking into the Parkinson freight case."

The reporters of the San Francisco dailies were assigned to interview President Kenney, of the E. & W., upon his arrival on the Limited on the afternoon of April 4th. It was rumored that the Interstate Commerce Commission had decided to summon him before it to testify in the Richmond rebate case. A hot interview was wanted. If President Kenney could be made to say that he would pay no attention to the summons, it would make good copy.

Half a dozen reporters were on the platform of the station when the Limited pulled in. Their language was perfervid when they found President Kenney was not on the train.

They asked the conductor where Kenney had dropped off. His reply was evasive, and left the impression on the minds of the reporters that he knew, but would not tell. The reporters speculated among themselves, and tried for definite information at the general offices. The official they best knew was extremely cordial. He assured the newspaper men that President Kenney had changed his plans, but he had not been advised upon what train he would arrive.

"I understand unofficially that he is looking into the Parkinson freight case," he volunteered, in the tone of a confidential statement.

The New York dailies had wired their representatives in San Francisco to rush an interview with President Kenney, outlining his testimony before the Interstate Commerce Commission. When they wired back that President Kenney had dropped off to look into the Parkinson freight case, the newspapers friendly to the E. & W. printed a few lines. The opposition newspapers had flare heads the following morning, charging Kenney with attempting to evade the summons of the commission. The Parkinson freight case was a pretext, the articles stated; and extracts from recent statements made by President Kenney were printed, showing that he had given instructions to name a lower rate to the shippers over the E. & W. in the southwest territory.

The friendly dailies printed interviews with leading officers of the road, declaring that President Kenney was not only willing, but anxious, to appear before the commission, and give it all the information he possessed. It was in line with the policy of the opposition to charge President Kenney with attempting to evade a summons; as a matter of fact, the summons had not been issued.

The opposition reiterated the charge, and, for want of livelier news, held Kenney up to the scorn of the readers as a man who had gone into hiding to escape the probing he knew awaited him.

Powerful influences were brought to bear on the Interstate Commerce Commission to have the summons issued. When this failed, the opposition printed in big headlines:

WHERE IS KENNEY?

And under this caption telegrams from correspondents were reproduced, expressing the inability of the reporters to locate the railway magnate. From some source, the rumor spread that President Kenney had broken down completely in health en route; and local physicians, hurriedly summoned, had advised his removal to a sanitarium. The opposition made every effort to uncover the resort.

E. & W. officials, much relieved by this plausible invention, reluctantly admitted the possible truth in the rumor, thus stamping it with truth. It was discovered by a reporter assigned to interview Doctor J. Boothby Haywood that that eminent physician had been summoned out of town. As he was President Kenney's family physician, and had admitted that his eminent patient was on the verge of prostration, the conclusion was reached—and not denied by E. & W. officials—that Doctor Haywood was now in attendance upon the railway king.

Peter Schley, the astute president of the A. & P., jubilant over the success of his conspiracy, watched and waited. He was content to hold back until it was no longer possible for the E. & W. to conceal the astounding fact that President Kenney had mysteriously disappeared. They could cover up the story for a time, but it was bound to come out. It would leak whenever Peter Schley was ready. He desired the prolonged absence of President Kenney to affect the stock market. The time to make his raid on the E. & W. stock was when the story broke.

At the first opportunity, Schley expressed to a prominent director of the E. & W. his sympathy for the serious condition of President Kenney's health. The director rather coldly thanked Schley, but did as the latter knew he would—mentioned the fact at the board meeting. The directors thought it was rather decent of Schley.

IX.

Manacled and under guard, Simpson, alias Hopper, alias Hoskins, alias Kenney, rode across the valley. The sun was genial, the air fresh. It was an ideal spring day. Kenney, however, was dead to all impressions of nature. He brooded during that long ride; the

utter weariness of fatigue was upon him. He had been a spectator in court when a man was convicted on circumstantial evidence. He believed from the evidence that the man was guilty of the crime. The facts appeared so damning that the verdict was a foregone conclusion.

Reviewing his own case, Kenney was forced to admit circumstances were similarly against him. He was no longer Robert Kenney, a great railway president, but Charles Simpson, charged with stage robbery and horse stealing. Western justice would be swift. He was helpless. For once in his life he experienced the bitterness of a man penniless and friendless. His outlook now was from the poor man's point of view.

The sheriff's posse rode clattering into a town—twelve shacks, three of which were saloons. Two cowboys galloped down the street, yelling and discharging their revolvers. A maudlin voice raised in song floated from a barroom. A dozen cow ponies stood in front of the saloons, bridles trailing on the ground. The posse halted, dismounted. Kenney was assisted from his pony and thrust through the door of a shack which adjoined one of the saloons. The sheriff unlocked the handcuffs, and, remarking that he would "hustle up some grub," left him to sink into a chair.

The room was bare, except for the chair and a table. Two small, square windows, high up, gave light and air. The door had a spring lock. It was a poor place to retain a desperate, resourceful stage robber, but to Kenney it was a fortress.

A wild thought to batter his way out came into his mind, only to be held under and drowned by a rush of reason. He would be shot down, or, if he escaped a bullet, death from starvation would follow.

Kenney's mind was trained along practical lines; his imagination had not had time to develop. Cold, calculating, naturally suspicious, nevertheless not for an instant did he suspect that he was the victim of a conspiracy.

The return of the sheriff interrupted his brooding. He brought a lighted lamp and supper. Going out, he returned with a bucket of water and a tin cup.

Kenney, unlike the hardened criminal, who either fawns upon his jailer or dejectedly hangs his head, was cool and collected. Without a trace of resentment, he asked:

"May I inquire what you propose to do with me?"

"You certainly may," was the hearty response. "I have sent a deputy to notify the chief of police at Dubois we have caught you. A detective or the chief himself will probably arrive here late the day after to-morrow. Meantime, we will take you before the squire on the charge of horse stealing. You will be held for court, and will be good for a long term in the penitentiary on both charges."

"One thing more. Have I the privilege of communicating with my friends?"

"Right again. I have attended to that. I instructed the deputy to make inquiries at Dubois about the hold-up. It ought to be in the papers. Understand, I don't take any stock in your yarn. I thought less of it when I looked over the San Francisco papers which got here on the monthly mail to-day."

"You only get mail once a month?" Kenney's voice indicated bitter disappointment.

"Once a month, brought over from Dubois, when some of the boys are coming this way. As I was sayin', when I saw the San Francisco papers, the bottom was knocked out of your yarn. Do you think you look like that man?" thundered the sheriff, holding out a newspaper.

"I most certainly do," asserted Kenney. "That is Robert Kenney, president of the E. & W. Railway. I am Robert Kenney, president of the E. & W. Railway, and I demand my instant release at your hands."

The sheriff laughed in derision.

"Step into the saloon next door with me," he said.

Kenney wondered, but arose and accompanied the sheriff. Pushing him through the swinging doors, the latter led Kenney to the bar and pointed to the mirror. Kenney's gaze followed the sheriff's outstretched finger. He saw reflected the faces of strange, bearded men. The eyes of some man gazed unblinking into his own. In moments of abstraction, Kenney fondled his long, side whiskers. He raised his hand to his face now, as he had done when the sheriff read the police circular. The action was repeated by the stranger reflected in the mirror. In that instant, he realized that he was gazing at his own image. What a caricature he was! Minus his prided whiskers, burned by the sun, a slouch hat, woolen shirt, open at the throat —this was Robert Kenney, the dignified, the immaculate?

The sheriff smiled sardonically as he noted Kenney's chagrin. He conducted him back to the shack. The incident would have shaken most men, but Kenney had become cool. He asked permission to read the newspaper. The picture, a stock cut, had been used to illustrate a special from New York, stating that President Kenney would leave on a Western trip April 29th. The date of the newspaper was April 20th.

"The grub's gettin' cold," suggested the sheriff.

It looked tempting to a hungry and not overfastidious man. Coffee without milk or sugar, fried potatoes smothered in grease, biscuits, and a thick steak, somewhat burned.

"Thank you, no," Kenney replied. "I will have some water."

"Suit yourself." The sheriff was amazed that a hungry man would pass up good food. "I'll leave it here, in case you change your mind."

"No, thank you; take it away."

The sheriff gathered up the dishes, and, striding out, said, over his shoulder:

"I'll throw you in a blanket. It ought to go good after sleepin' in the grass."

"I never slept in the grass in my life," indignantly retorted Kenney.

The door clicked on the prisoner, and through the boarding he heard the sheriff chuckling as he walked away.

The time passed in the shack was a nightmare to Kenney. He missed the luxuries with which he had been surrounded. To lie on the floor, rolled in a blanket, shirt and overalls for a pillow, is the refinement of cruelty for a man accustomed to a soft bed. He was not comfortable in any position he assumed. The unwonted excitement of the day kept him awake. Once he dropped into a light sleep, only to start up and fall back, groaning. He ached in every muscle.

At sunrise, he was aroused by the entrance of the sheriff, bringing in a breakfast of black coffee, biscuits, and steak. Kenney washed his face in a basin of cold water. It felt refreshing. The air was sweet and invigorating. He ate a morsel of biscuit, and cut off a small portion of rare steak. It was juicy and tender. He masticated it slowly, extracting and enjoying the juice. Several cups of the sweet mountain water concluded his simple breakfast.

The sheriff watched, an amused smile on his face.

"I was wonderin' where you get your nerve to hold up stagecoaches," he explained. "You don't eat enough to keep a fly alive."

"To be frank," Kenney replied, "that is the first breakfast I have eaten in ten years."

"It's your funeral," was the retort. Resuming a sober demeanor, the sheriff continued:

"We ain't allowed compensation for feedin' prisoners. Hence, it's your misfortune that you will have to earn your feed until such time as you are taken off my hands. Are you any kind of a mechanic?"

"I cannot say that I am; formerly I was a pretty fair surveyor."

"Do you think you could build a fence if you were shown how?"

"I probably could do it as well as the average man who never had performed that kind of work."

"Right; come along."

Kenney found every joint in his body complaining as he followed the sheriff. He was given a hammer and nails, and set to work nailing boards. It was torture for the first few hours. As the sun limbered him up, he did better. The handle of the hammer blistered his hands; he had a crook in his back every time he straightened up. But he kept doggedly at work. The comment of the sheriff that he had done "pretty good," and that "buildin' fences paid better in the end than holdin' up stage-coaches," was not resented as it would have been yesterday.

Clearly, Kenney was learning the lesson of humility. He ate a more generous slice of steak, munched his bread, and drank the mountain water with a keener enjoyment after his day of manual labor. Subconsciously, he was adapting himself to circumstances. Brainy men, born leaders, are more easily reconciled to the lack of comforts under stress than those who have risen from poverty to wealth and been forced back by a reversal of fortune. The president of a great railway rolled himself up in his blanket on the hard floor, and, shutting out troublesome thoughts, fell asleep like a tired child. At sunrise, he was enjoying his tin-basin bath, swallowing great gulps of the bracing air, which common-sense mode of prolonging life by the full exercise of the lungs did better work than the prescriptions of Doctor Haywood.

The sheriff gave Kenney odds and ends of work to do that day. Cowboys clattered in and clattered out of the town. Momentarily, Kenney expected the sheriff to notify him that his deputy had returned. He never questioned that he would bring confirmation of the hold-up. Nothing escaped the reporters. The telegraph wires would hum with it, and the story would be in all the newspapers.

After supper, the sheriff announced: "The Dubois papers say that President Kenney is in the Southwest, lookin' into some freight case. Here! Read for yourself."

As Kenney read the special, it came to him in a flash. The news had been suppressed. While he knew that they were following out his own policy, it angered him that the E. & W. officials had not raised a hue and cry. How could they hope to keep the news of such a bold crime as the kidnapping of himself out of the newspapers? There was that explosion he had heard after he was led from the car. That surely was the blowing open of the safe in the express car. And yet there was not a word of this in the special. He heard the sheriff say:

"The chief sent a man back with my deputy to have a look at you. There's been another stage robbery, which looks like Simpson's work."

"That means you will release me?" eagerly questioned Kenney.

"There you go now, with the bit between your teeth. Don't forget there's a little matter of horse stealing standin' against you."

The eagerness faded out of the prisoner's face; he had forgotten the piebald.

The sheriff went out, and came back with a stranger.

"Howdy," the latter said. He looked Kenney over with keen eyes, shook his head negatively at the sheriff, and walked out. The sheriff followed. Beyond earshot, the chief's man said:

"He sure does look some like Simpson. Might be his twin brother. Simpson is broader-shouldered and a drinking man. I take it your prisoner ain't partial to liquor."

Left to his thoughts, Kenney realized the utter hopelessness of his case. They would swear he had stolen the horse. He would be sent up for trial. Then hope revived. Face to face with the judge, he would force him to inquire into his identity. But another thought came to torment him. Would the court listen to his plea, when the E. & W. officials had declared that President Kenney was in the Southwest? He would be branded as a rank impostor, and short shrift would be made of him.

The sheriff found him in a black mood when he returned.

"I thought I was going to divide that five hundred dollars reward among

the boys," he said, "but it seems you're not Simpson. I didn't believe you had the nerve to hold up a stagecoach horse. Stealin' is more in your line. I've sent for Benson to appear agin' you to-morrow before the squire."

"What judge presides over the court?" inquired Kenney.

"Judge Colby; been on the circuit about a month."

"Where do you hold court?"

"Over at Blackstown, the last week in June."

"Do you mean to tell me that I will have to stay here until June, awaiting trial?"

"That's the idea exactly. For a horse thief, you reason straight, which is some remarkable." The sheriff left the shack, and again that chuckle came to Kenney. The sheriff seemed amused. As for Kenney, he swore volubly.

In the morning, word came that Benson had left for the spring round-up. The sheriff's deputy had been too late to serve the summons on him. In the absence of the complaining witness, Kenney was held in bail until such time as Benson returned. As Kenney could not furnish the bail, he was remanded into custody.

X.

Cattle were numerous that spring. The winter had been mild, and the ranges were fairly black with them. Every stray cowboy looking for a job was taken on. The demand was greater than the supply. The sheriff had an inspiration. He tried it on the squire, and the next day saw Kenney, in charge of a deputy, on the way to the 3Y ranch. When they arrived, the outfit was on the point of leaving for the round-up. A buxom woman stood in the door, looking on.

"The sheriff says if you're short," the deputy explained to Big Bill Hains, "and you kin make use of this here gent, you're welcome to him for his keep. The only condition is, he says, he must be sent back to him after round-up."

This was a chance of saving thirty dollars a month that Big Bill could not afford to overlook. A cowboy's relentless eye noted the tenderfoot in Kenney, but he was willing to try him out, and the bargain was struck.

Kenney found himself merged in a hard-riding, hard-swearing, and, for the most part, silent, crew of six. The cook seemed to have an idea that, being a tenderfoot, the only job fit for Kenney was to assist him with the grub. He was inclined to be chummy. Kenney embraced the opportunity to inquire about the country, leading up to the location of the nearest railway station.

"You kin search me," replied the cook. "I joined this outfit yesterday. All this country looks alike to me."

It seemed peculiar that during his captivity no names of localities had been mentioned. The country resembled Montana, but it might be Wyoming. Clearly, if he expected to get back to civilization, he first must become acquainted with the locality. The first step in this direction was to forget he was a railroad president and mix in with the cowboys.

Then he suddenly remembered his wife and daughters. It occurred to him that not once had he given them a thought since his capture. It was true that they did not see much of him at best. He was a very busy man; they had their social duties. They never met at breakfast; occasionally, they saw one another at dinner, but always with guests present. He wondered why his thoughts should take this turn. Then he recalled seeing the buxom woman at the 3Y ranch, who stood in the doorway. She looked like a motherly soul. If he fell ill, he would like a woman like her to smooth the pillow and tuck in the bed clothes.

"Bless my soul, I am becoming sentimental!" he groaned. "I wonder what Schley is doing about this time. I wonder if that old pirate is mixed up in this affair. Pshaw! He would not dare; and yet I bet he is mighty glad to have me out of the way. I was pushing him hard in the rate matter. When

I get back, I will have this affair raked over with a fine-tooth comb. That ruffian who struck me in the car—I would know his face in a thousand."

His thoughts trailed on as the ponies covered mile after mile at an easy lope.

When the outfit made camp, late that afternoon, Kenney was as good as his word to mix with the cowboys. There was one of them called Dan, whom he instinctively disliked. He was a black-browed, surly fellow, who bore the traces of hard drinking. The others were easy-going young fellows, apparently without a care in the world. Jack, the foreman, was a curly-headed giant. Kenney admired his grace, and envied him his health and youth.

He watched the cowboys make pillows of their saddles and lie down, face resting on folded arms. It was a novel sensation, this lying on the ground, the sky bespangled with stars above him, the air blowing sweet. The silence of the night stole into his senses, and he slept. When day broke, he arose, alert, strangely refreshed.

The following day, at noon, the outfit drew up at Jim Donovan's ranch. The women folks, at dinner, rushed to the door to greet the cowboys, and invite them in to have a "bite." A most tantalizing aroma of fresh biscuits was wafted to Kenney's nostrils. The cowboys bashfully demurred, but finally trooped into the house. The dignified Kenney had been designated already as "Professor," shortened to "Profess," the first day out. The women were quick to observe the deference he paid them.

Donovan's comely daughter, ignoring the ardent glances of Dan, busied herself with Kenney's plate. She piled it full of boiled meat, potatoes, and rich brown gravy. Dan shot a venomous glance at Kenney when the latter's well-bred "Thank you" brought a blush to the girl's cheeks.

The noisiest and most reckless men in a revel, cowboys are the most diffident in the presence of women. To the cultivated taste of Kenney, they were boors at table. It seemed to him as if each man tried to outdo the other in cleaning up his plate. Dan finished first. Moving clumsily from the table, he paused at Kenney's chair, to whisper hoarsely:

"Them high-toned airs don't go in this country, you damned tenderfoot."

Kenney ignored the insult. He detected Jack watching Dan. As the latter sauntered out of the dining room, Jack sauntered after him.

The outfit was ready to start. With the exception of Dan, all the cowboys were in the saddle. Dan, pretending to adjust something, suddenly strode over to Miss Donovan, standing at the door, threw an arm around her waist, and bent to kiss her. Jack was out of the saddle in an instant. He tore Dan's arm away, swung him around, and struck him full in the face.

Dan fell sprawling, but was up in a flash, his gun half drawn. Jack, who could draw quicker than any man on the 3Y ranch, had his gun out. There was death in his face.

With an attempt at a smile, Dan said whiningly:

"That's all right; I meant it for a joke."

In a lower key, overheard by Kenney, he muttered, "I'll git you for that," finishing with a vile epithet.

Kenney expected the cowboys to shun Dan, as he would have shunned a man in his own circle who had offered insult to a woman. He was surprised when they began to chaff Jack, instead of commending him, as Kenney thought they would.

"If I was interested in that there piece of calico," remarked one, "I sure would put up a 'Keep off the grass' sign."

"And me ridin' with Jack two years, and never tumbled he was sentimental!" sighed another.

Jack fell back out of earshot, grinning.

Kenney ranged alongside. "Every man seems to be his own avenger out here," he began, anxious to make a friend of the foreman. "Now, where I came from, you would have been ar-

rested, tried, and convicted for assault and battery."

"Is that right?"

"Yes," continued Kenney, believing that he had Jack interested. "Take my own case; I am the victim of a series of grave errors."

No reply from Jack.

"I am in this country against my will, shorn of my whiskers, and robbed of my proper clothing."

"You take it from me," spoke up Jack, "nobody asks questions in this here country."

"But, good Lord, man, when a person as prominent as I am is forcibly abducted, robbed, and charged with a crime he never committed—I am Robert Kenney, president of the E. & W. Railway."

"If you keep it mum, Profess, I'll tell you something," whispered Jack, grinning. "I am the original Charlie Ross, the long-lost, kidnapped kid."

And, vastly pleased by his humor, Jack spurred ahead, leaving Kenney to ruminate over the peculiar phases of Western life.

The round-up was in full sway. Kenney was kept on the jump from morning until night. His days were strenuous and exciting. The plains were black with cattle and long-legged calves. It was not the pastoral picture the farmer's boy sees when he goes to the pasture to milk. The cattle were half wild. There was a constant tossing of horns, a restless movement all over the plains like the roll of the ocean. In and out wove the cowboys, the burden of the work falling upon the trained ponies. The branding irons pressed hard upon the hairy bodies, bit deep into the flesh. The cowboys worked swiftly and unerringly, seemingly recklessly. Kenney was cursed for his awkwardness; "jollied" when, by sheer luck, he escaped from a predicament; and, incontinently, shoved aside when he got in the way. But whatever he did, it was intelligently done. As the cook said to the foreman:

"Profess is a-goin' to make good, I'm a-tellin' you."

The day in the saddle, the toil and the excitement kept Kenney from brooding. But after sundown, while the cowboys lounged around the camp fire, his mind became troubled; and, one night, when despair was strongest upon him, he casually left the circle, stole cautiously to his pony, saddled and mounted it. He lifted the reins to ride away, when a sinister voice sounded out of the gloom:

"Goin' for a little exercise, Profess?"

"Is that any of your concern?" Kenney, exasperated, retorted.

He recognized Dan's husky accents. Nevertheless, he dismounted and removed the saddle.

The following day an incident occurred. The cook told Kenney about it, otherwise he never would have heard a word from the cowboys.

"That fool Dan," the cook said, "pretty near stampeded the herd today. If Pete and Ike hadn't got to Jack on their ponies it would have been good-by for him."

"You don't tell me!" Kenney exclaimed.

"Well, I am tellin' you," snapped back the cook. "Dan he pulls out his gun to crack an obstreperous cow over the head, when the gun goes off. Jack was a little ways off, on foot. Dan was on his pony, a-cuttin' out this particular bovine. Well, sir, when the herd hears this yer gun, they begins to 'mill,' an' they was a-crowdin' Jack when Pete an' Ike jumps in an' gets him out. Jack was down when they got to him."

"I am glad he escaped," commented Kenney.

A week later, just before dawn, Kenney was aroused by some one stepping softly by him. He saw a shadowy form pause by the side of the sleeping Jack and drop something into one of his boots. As the man turned to steal away, Kenney caught a view of his profile. There was no mistaking that sinister face. It was Dan, and Kenney wondered what he was doing. When day broke, he sauntered over to Jack, who was yawning, and told him what

he had seen, advising him to empty his boot.

Jack laughed good-humoredly, but seized the boot by the heel, and quickly turned it upside down. Something slithered down the inside of the boot, darting away in an instant.

"A snake!" exclaimed Kenney, in horror.

"Profess," drawled Jack, without a trace of excitement or resentment, "if I had 'a' stepped on that there reptile, he sure would have bit me, an' that reptile is some poisonous, I can tell you."

"Are you going to let it drop at that? Don't you propose to call Dan to account for his dastardly act?"

"Shucks, no; that's another of his little jokes."

"On the same order, I suppose, as that stampede! I am thankful that I live in a civilized section, where the law takes cognizance of crimes," retorted Kenney.

"It's this way, Profess; we take a chance, an' give a chance. Some day, when I git real mad, I'll have a little interview with Dan."

And, for the second time, Kenney ruminated on the peculiarities of Western ways.

As the weeks passed, Kenney hardened to the work. It was coarse and distasteful, but there was a swing and a dash, a freedom, an exhilaration that somehow quickened his blood. When he left New York, he was a sick man. Now, as the round-up neared an end, he was eating and digesting the rough, but wholesome, food, and sleeping like a schoolboy. He awoke every morning fresh and invigorated. He could ride all day without fatigue. His mind, released from the strain it had been under, was having a rest. His lungs were filled every day to their full capacity with the pure air of the plains.

He felt that he had made a friend of Jack. There was to be a dance Friday night—an important social function, if Kenney was to judge from the "slicking up" of the cowboys in preparation for it. When the evening arrived, Jack invited Kenney to take it in. Ordinarily, he would have declined. But he could not afford to lose the slightest chance to slip away, and this opportunity might come while the cowboys were enjoying themselves.

As the ponies covered mile after mile in the soft night air, Kenney wondered where, in that wilderness, a dance could be given. He did not ask questions. The way seemed interminably long; but, finally, an hour before midnight, the party pulled up before a building bravely lighted—one of a score straggling down the main street of a town. It proved to be the schoolhouse. The scraping of a fiddle, the pounding of feet, and the caller's stentorian voice came floating out on the night air.

"Hang the man who steals the sheep," shouted the caller, drowning the sound of the fiddle. The boys from the 3Y ranch pushed, grinning, through the door. Kenney, mildly interested, glanced into the room. Girls, flushed and laughing, gingerly held by brawny cowboys, romped to the strains of the fiddle.

"Let the daylight under his feet." The caller's voice arose above the din. The cowboys without partners slapped their knees in time to the dance.

"Don't cut him down until he's dead," and, as the figure neared an end, the caller intoned:

"Then fill his body full of lead."

Kenney turned from the door, smiling. He compared the scene with the great social functions he occasionally had attended, and admitted that, for pure enjoyment, the cowboys had the best of it.

What was that? A sound came out of the blackness of the night—the honk of an automobile. Far off he could see the gleam of the lamps. He did not stop to marvel why an automobile should happen to be in this wild country at that time of night. An inspiration came to him. He ran to his pony, climbed into the saddle, and dashed off to meet the oncoming machine.

As the light from the lamps caught him, the pony shied violently. Kenney, anticipating the action, fell in the road.

The pony, snorting with fear, fled away. The chauffeur put on the brakes, stopping the machine close to Kenney, prostrate on the ground. The chauffeur and the man seated with him sprang out, and got Kenney on his feet, solicitously inquiring if he was hurt.

"I think not," replied Kenney. "I guess the saddle must have slipped."

"Your pony's gone; have you far to go?" was the question that made his blood sing.

"I was on my way to the railroad. I have received word that my father is critically ill——"

"Jump right in; we'll get you to the railroad in a jiffy. Oh, it will be only a trifle out of our road; we have plenty of time. We're mighty glad to do it, seeing you have lost your pony."

Kenney feared the men would notice his eagerness in getting into the automobile. He could have shouted with joy. He trembled as the big car passed the schoolhouse; the fear of Dan was in his mind. The auto shot through the town at a twenty-five-miles-an-hour clip, and Kenney leaned back on the soft cushions, breathing thankfulness. The world looked good to him at that precise moment.

XI.

The automobilists asked Kenney many questions about the cattle business, which he answered out of his large experience as a railroad man rather than from the cowboy's point of view. They proved to be mining men, and they did not revert to the loss of his pony until the journey had been resumed, after stopping for breakfast at a ranch house, where the rancher was greeted as an old acquaintance.

Harding, the elder of the two men in the car, took out a roll of money.

"I suppose," he said, "that pony of yours is as good as lost?"

"I have no doubt some of the boys will pick him up," Kenney replied.

"But in case he does not return to the ranch, what value do you place on him?"

"I am only too glad to call it square for the lift you are giving me."

"The ride is not costing us a penny, but it takes money to buy broken cow ponies. I understand you to say you left in a hurry; how are you fixed for change?"

"Well, to be frank," said Kenney, with embarrassment, "I did leave without drawing my wages."

"You'll need money to travel; let me advance you fifty dollars." And Harding flipped out a bill from the roll.

"If I reach a railroad," said Kenney, declining the generous offer, "I assure you that's my most pressing need. Thank you very much."

"I know you cowboys would sooner rough it than ride comfortably. A berth in a Pullman and a soft chair always look good to me. How about it, Jackson?" laughed Harding, addressing his partner at the wheel.

"That's Harding, all right. Why, he growls because he can't have a spring bed up at the mines."

Harding ruminated on the peculiarity of a man refusing money. His hardest work was to keep it in his own pocket. Kenney wondered if he had not made a mistake by not accepting the loan. The obligation could be settled in full as soon as he had his check book in his hand.

Jackson, the chauffeur, had struck a stretch of good road, and let out a few links. Conversation languished. Kenney was absorbed in thought. Once more a free man, he could bring his mind back to the great railroad problems which had engrossed it before his astounding series of experiences. He was in the midst of his planning when the big car slowed down to cross the track at a small freight station. Harding jumped out, and entered into conversation with the agent, who seemed to know him. If Kenney had been looking, he would have seen the mining man slip a banknote to the agent.

When Harding returned, there was a satisfied look on his face. "Palmer tells me the through freight is due here in an hour. The passenger trains do not stop at this station. He says he can arrange it so you can go in the caboose. I take it you are going East?"

"Yes, as far as Chicago," said Kenney.

"Well, Palmer will use a little freemasonry and get you through. Good-by."

When the through freight pulled in, Palmer had a little talk with the conductor, who looked Kenney over with what he regarded as an unfriendly eye. It was with evident relief that the conductor told Kenney to get into the caboose and make himself comfortable.

XII.

It was a blazing hot morning in late June when a tall man, in cowboy attire, burned like an Indian, and bearded like a pirate, dropped off a freight train in the Chicago yards of the A. & P., and set out for the offices of the E. & W. Pedestrians, stopping to mop their streaming faces, gazed with astonishment at the cowboy, who was striding along the streets, regardless of the heat.

"It beats all," one perspiring man said to another, "how them cowboys can stand the heat. I'll bet it feels cool here to that fellow."

Kenney entered the outer office of General Manager Thayer, forgetting his altered appearance and strange attire, remembering only that he was the president of the road. He was amazed, consequently, when he attempted to pass through the gate that guarded the entrance, to have his passage blocked by a clerk, who inquired:

"Whom do you wish to see?"

"Is Thayer in?" The tone was peremptory.

"Mr. Thayer is very busy. Please state your business." He was disconcerted by the fierce glare the cowboy bent upon him.

Kenney opened the gate, and shoved the man aside. The chief clerk came bustling up, with an air of having the responsibilities of the entire railway upon his shoulders.

"What is it you wish?" he began. But Kenney was past him in a stride, and the next moment had entered the private office of the general manager.

Thayer looked up, frowning, as the strange, bearded man burst unceremoniously into his office. His tone was freezing, as he said:

"What is it?"

"Don't you know me, Albert?"

"Great God, is it you, Robert?" He started up, the look of utter incredulity giving way to an expression of supreme joy.

"Pardon me for surprising you, Albert, but I could not wire."

"But why this disguise?" inquired Thayer.

"Disguise? Oh——"

"Here, take a look at yourself, and then ask why I did not know you." Thayer flung back the door of his wardrobe, and thrust Kenney before the mirror on the back.

"For God's sake, Robert, what happened? Where is the *Suwanee?*"

"The *Suwanee?* Why, when they took me from it, the coach was standing on the track."

"When they took you from it?" Thayer's bewilderment was painful. "When *who* took you from it?"

"The hold-up men. You will tell me, I suppose, the Limited was not held up and the safe in the express car blown open." Kenney was showing signs of impatience.

"Robert, listen. The probably terrible experience you have passed through has upset you. The Limited was *not* held up. The express safe was *not* blown open. The only mishap was to your car. It disappeared from the rear of the Limited, and, although Flenner has worked night and day, *not a trace of it has been found.* I will convince you that what I said is the exact truth. Here are Flenner's reports. Read them."

Thayer watched every expression of his face—incredulity, amazement, stupefaction. When Kenney concluded, he sank, nerveless, into a chair.

"I do not know where I was held up, or what became of the car after the men led me from it. I heard an explosion—I thought it was the robbers blowing up the express safe. I see now it was the *Suwanee* they blew up."

Briefly, but succinctly, Kenney re-

lated what had befallen him, from the time he aroused from slumber in his private car to find himself confronted by three masked men until he escaped in the automobile.

On the way to the hotel, Thayer posted Kenney on all the matters he was anxious to know about.

"We have kept your disappearance a secret," he said. "It was rumored that you had broken down in health and gone to a sanitarium. We did not deny it, but encouraged the story, as it kept the opposition off the scent. The newspapers have been asking daily, 'Where is Kenney?' and doing their utmost to locate the sanitarium. Yesterday, Schley's organs came out with a new sensation. It was charged that you were seen in Honduras, avoiding the public, and a demand was made that an investigation be made of the securities of the E. & W. It produced a tremendous sensation. Our stock dropped two points."

A flash from Chicago informed Schley that Kenney had arrived in that city. He thought it was a ruse to head off the raid on the E. & W. stock. Later, the report was confirmed in the Associated Press dispatches. A long interview was printed with Kenney, in which he stated he was restored to health, full of fight, and ready to wreak vengeance on the clique back of the bear movement.

Schley was unprepared for this news. He paced his private office in a frenzy, swearing wild, terrible oaths. Had Fox sold him out? No, Schley did not believe that. It was the finest scheme he had ever concocted. It had worked splendidly. Things were coming his way. Now, Kenney's premature return ruined everything. Fox had done his work well. It was Schley, himself, who had bungled. When he recalled his conversation with Fox, he remembered fixing the duration of Kenney's captivity at about three months. The time limit was up. He saw that his own tardiness was to blame. The story should have leaked.

Wall Street for the next few days was a seething caldron. Kenney led the attack with a fury that surprised seasoned brokers, participants in many a hot battle. Schley, at bay, like a wounded tiger, fought with desperation, but he was no match for the new man who faced him. Kenney showed him no mercy. He hammered him until he cried for quarter. The newspapers estimated Schley's loss at one million dollars, but fell far short of the real figure. In the bitterness of defeat, Schley brooded over his downfall. Kenney, in this supreme effort, had securely intrenched himself as the railway king. Henceforth, he reigned alone.

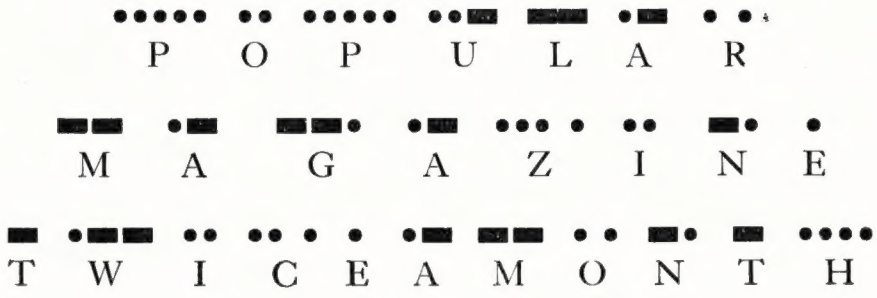
During the hot ride in the caboose to Chicago, Kenney had fondly dwelt upon the luxury of a night passed in his own bed. After the smoke of the battle had drifted away, he joined his family at Newport. He was welcomed by his wife and daughters with well-bred manifestations of pleasure. Their social duties had fully occupied them during his "retreat" at the sanitarium.

He retired to his room early, but he resented strangely the presence of his obsequious valet. He missed the clear, brilliant sky, the soft air, the twinkling stars, the illimitable distances of the plains. When he got into bed, instead of balmy sleep, he was wide awake. The luxurious bedroom was stifling, the bed softly uncomfortable. In desperation, he sprang out, seized a blanket, and, spreading it on the hard floor of the balcony, rolled himself up in it in cowboy fashion. His last thought, as he sank into a blissful sleep, was of the secret enemy who unwittingly had been his friend.

Jack's remark flashed through his mind: "It's this way, Profess; we take a chance an' give a chance. Some day when I git real mad, I'll have a little interview with Dan."

"We give a chance an' take a chance." All his life, Kenney reflected, he had been taking chances, but giving none. No doubt Jack was right. Some day he would uncover this secret enemy who had been his friend, and he would follow Jack's advice—wait until he got real mad.

THE WIRES ARE HUMMING



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